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KOHN, A. J. 1960a. Ecological notes on *Conus* (Mollusca: Gastropoda) in the Trincomalee region of Ceylon. *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* (13) 2 (17): 309–320.

KOHN, A. J. 1960b. Spawning behaviour, egg masses and larval development in *Conus* from the Indian Ocean. *Bulletin of the Bingham Oceanographic Collection, Yale University* 17 (4): 1–51.

THIELE, J. 1910. Mollusca. B. Polyplacophora, Gastropoda marina, Bivalvia. In: SCHULTZE, L. *Zoologische und anthropologische Ergebnisse einer Forschungsreise im westlichen und zentralen Süd-Afrika ausgeführt in den Jahren 1903–1905* 4 (15). *Denkschriften der medizinisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft zu Jena* 16: 269–270.

(continued inside back cover)

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SOME NGUNI CRAFTS
PART 4
SKIN-WORKING TECHNOLOGY

By

LINDSAY HOOPER, PATRICIA DAVISON
& GERALD KLINGHARDT

Cape Town

Kaapstad

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SOME NGUNI CRAFTS

PART 4

SKIN-WORKING TECHNOLOGY

By

LINDSAY HOOPER, PATRICIA DAVISON & GERALD KLINGHARDT

Department of Ethnography, South African Museum, Cape Town

(With 58 figures and 1 table)

[MS accepted 15 September 1987]

ABSTRACT

The techniques of skin-working and the utilization of skin artefacts among Nguni-speaking people from the nineteenth century onwards are recorded from historical and ethnographic literature, from museum collections, and from fieldwork undertaken at intervals during the past two decades. The skin resources utilized by Nguni craftsmen included domestic and, to a lesser extent, game animals. Considerable uniformity was found in the processes of skin-dressing among the historically distinct Southern and Northern Nguni groups. In the artefacts produced, however, cultural differences were more clearly discernible. The hides and skins of certain animals were invested with cultural significance and were used for particular items of clothing, ornament and equipment. The continued selective use of animal skins, especially for clothing, indicated the symbolic value attached to their use in the expression of cultural identity and status in changing social contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

This study of skin-working technology is largely an historical account of processes and artefacts that were formerly essential to the Nguni economy and material culture. The historical record has to some extent been supplemented by the incorporation of information collected during field expeditions between 1969 and 1983. Details are in the introduction to the series (Shaw 1976). It must be remembered, however, that apparent continuities with past practices have been observed in a twentieth-century context significantly different from that of the early nineteenth century. This is part of a larger study undertaken by the Department of Ethnography, South African Museum, under the general direction of Margaret Shaw. While the three authors collaborated on the work as a whole, Lindsay Hooper was primarily responsible for the section on the Northern Nguni, which includes the Natal Nguni, Swazi and Ndebele in the Transvaal and Zimbabwe, Patricia Davison for the section on the Southern Nguni, and Gerald Klinghardt for the section on resources and change.

In line with previous studies in this series the unit of study is the Nguni branch of the southern African Bantu-speaking people. Delimiting such a unit and its representativeness are not unproblematical. As noted by Van Warmelo (1974: 60) 'Nguni' is a term of ethnographic convenience based on linguistic affinity, for the people themselves have no name for this grouping. Its usage does not reflect an ethnic identity assumed by these people or imply cultural uniformity through time. Indeed, an historical study of regional political processes operating in the area covered would show the relatively recent date of the formation of the classificatory units defined by Van Warmelo.

By the time of initial contact with Europeans, the various groups making up the Nguni were distributed in a broad belt between the sea and the interior plateau (though the immediate coastal regions were little used at that time) from the present-day central Transvaal to the eastern Cape. During the nineteenth century, large-scale population shifts and cultural discontinuities occurred following the rise of quasi-imperial states like that of the Zulu. This caused the emigration of groups such as the Ndebele, now in Zimbabwe, and the formation of aggregations of refugees such as the Mfengu of the eastern Cape. This study follows the major divisions of the Nguni recognized by Van Warmelo (1974: 60-68). The paucity of data on the formation and material culture of many of the groups within these divisions has necessitated the use of these arbitrary classifications in order to present a representative account of skin-working technology in this important cultural grouping.

The study is confined to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during which time the central feature of known Nguni history was the transition of the majority of these people from their 'pre-colonial existence as pastoralist-cultivators to their contemporary status: that of sub-subsistence rural dwellers, manifestly unable to support themselves by agriculture, and dependent for survival upon wages earned in "white" industrial regions or on "white" farms' (Bundy 1972: 369). This process was generated by a combination of environmental factors, internal socio-economic forces and subjection to external influences stemming mainly from contact with Europeans. Initial attempts by the Nguni to accommodate the colonists were followed by unsuccessful resistance that ended in the loss of political power, social cohesion, and economic autonomy. This led to far-reaching processes of transformation that resulted in the development of new social and cultural patterns.

A material aspect of this transformation may be seen in the decline in the incidence of crafts, particularly that of skin-working. The adoption of factory-made European goods combined with the loss of sources of raw materials led to the disappearance of many older practices, although some were retained as part of an active African response to new economic opportunities. The virtual extinction of formerly widespread and numerous species of wild animals, the loss of land, the growth of population, and the development of new attitudes towards the use of items made of skin, have largely eliminated skin-working as a significant economic activity.

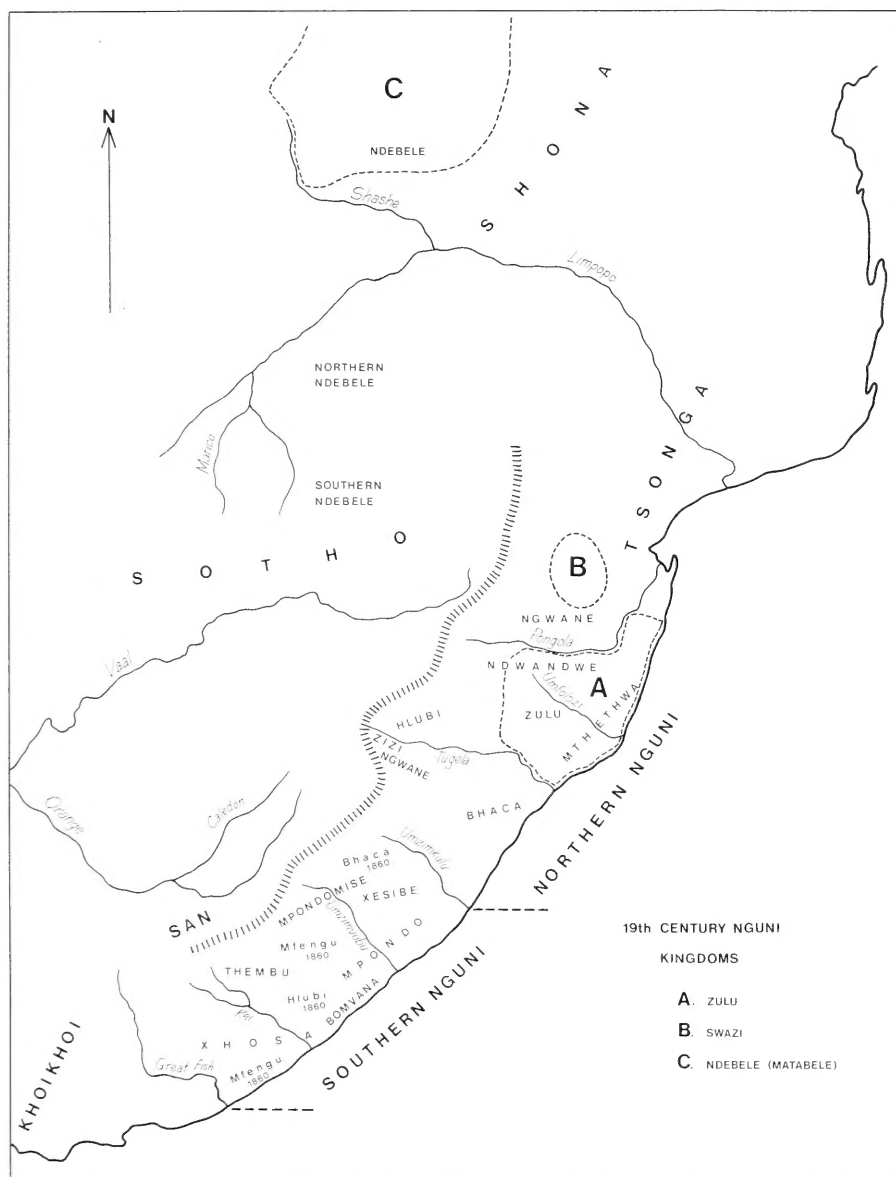


Fig. 1. Historical distribution of Nguni-speaking people, late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. (After Wilson 1969.)

RESOURCES AND CHANGE

In former times the Nguni made extensive use of skins and hides obtained from livestock and game in order to meet their needs for clothing, ornaments and utensils. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, indigenous animals were abundant throughout the area occupied by the Nguni and a wide range of species was exploited for meat and hides. The grasslands fringed by subtropical forests in the eastern Cape, Natal and Swaziland, and the savannahs and dry woodlands of the Transvaal and Zimbabwe were able to support both indigenous animals and the livestock kept by the Nguni and their Khoikhoi and Sotho neighbours.

Although the accounts of early travellers (Paterson 1789; Thunberg 1793; Barrow 1806) show that game abounded in the eastern Cape, Natal and Transvaal, and was widely hunted by the indigenous population, it is clear that during the nineteenth century there was no uniform pattern of dependence on hunting for raw materials and food among all the Nguni groups, nor through time in any one group. Among the Southern Nguni, for example, the Xhosa appear to have been more mobile and dependent on pastoralism and hunting than other groups, particularly during the frontier wars (Wilson 1969: 110). In Natal and Swaziland the expansion of the Zulu under Shaka significantly affected the availability of skin resources for all the inhabitants of those regions. Vast tracts of land became available as hunting ranges, and large herds of cattle were appropriated by the king and his favoured chiefs from conquered groups. The centralization of Zulu social life around military requirements demanded an increased efficiency in the mass production of items such as shields and warriors' dress. Hunting was extensive in order to obtain hides, horns and ivory, not only for local specialized uses but also, perhaps more importantly, for profitable barter with traders at Delagoa Bay and Port Natal. Tribute levied on subject groups and exacted from neighbouring people under threat was often paid in the form of quantities of game skins, an example being the monkey skins sent to the Zulu kings by the Tsonga living around Maputo. Little is known of the early nineteenth-century Ndebele in the Transvaal, but there is little doubt that their use of skins from indigenous animals paralleled that of the Nguni to the south.

In all the Nguni groups hunting was regarded as a male occupation and was a means of acquiring prestige (Bigalke 1966: 7). The skins obtained from game were used in the manufacture of garments, accessory items and for other utilitarian purposes, but certain species of game, notably cats and primates, furnished both sexes with clothing and ornaments indicative of the wearer's status.

Despite the existence of a wide range of indigenous animals, the available information suggests that the primary skin resource from the nineteenth century onwards was that of domestic livestock. Hides and skins from cattle and goats, the latter formerly used mainly by poorer people but becoming more general in the twentieth century, provided the basic material for the manufacture of clothing before the introduction of cloth. The apparent anomaly between a widespread use of skins from domestic livestock and a well-documented reluctance to part with

cattle, owing to their high social value, can be resolved by reference to the frequency of ritual and festive slaughters.

In the early nineteenth century, the expansion of European colonies and influx of refugees from elsewhere exerted increasing pressure on the land occupied by the Nguni. This drastically reduced the possibilities for the free movement of Nguni groups to unoccupied areas according to the cyclical availability of grazing and the requirements of cereal cultivation. In the south of the Nguni area attempts to relieve these pressures through increased raiding, warfare and support for millenarian movements, such as the 'cattle-killing' among the Xhosa and Thembu in 1856–7, led to internal dissolution that precipitated submission to European rule. In the north, similar encroachments culminated in the collapse of the Zulu state in 1879. All these processes produced new conditions of existence in which widespread exploitation of game and domestic animals was no longer possible and the use of skin declined accordingly.

Under European rule the transformation of the Nguni socio-economic system proceeded rapidly (Peires 1981). While some of the surplus population was drawn into wage-labour on farms or in towns, peasant farmers expanded such opportunities for cultivation as existed on the reduced amount of land left to them. Many adopted new agricultural techniques and equipment, such as the plough, and invested in types of livestock with more cash potential. Though cattle remained a capital investment, the transition to a cash economy changed attitudes towards their disposal. The introduction of money as a medium of exchange meant that livestock and hides could be sold in order to obtain the means of purchasing goods that had come to be regarded as necessities, as can be seen in the case of the large scale cattle-trading conducted by the Mpondo in the second half of the nineteenth century (Beinart 1982: 23). In contrast with the situation under the previous pattern of exchange trading, these changes in practices and attitudes produced permanent changes in the pattern of exploitation of natural resources, which were hastened by natural disasters such as the rinderpest epidemic of 1897.

In addition to excessive hunting encouraged by the use of firearms, the numbers and distribution of indigenous animals diminished as the amount of natural cover shrank with the creation of farmlands, while in those areas grazed by domestic animals the game was unable to live on the unpalatable types of replacement vegetation. The beginning of this process was already evident in the eastern Cape in the early nineteenth century. In combination with the socio-political factors, the consequences of overstocking—declining quality of livestock, and increased vulnerability to disease and drought—played an important role in institutionalizing poverty in the rural areas and increasing involvement in the national economy in the twentieth century. These pervasive changes reduced the economic importance of cattle-keeping, and an explanation for the persistence of a limited amount of skin-working in certain areas, up to the time of writing, will have to be sought in reasons other than economic necessity, including the expression of conservatism, trends in fashion, and contemporary ethnic consciousness.

SOUTHERN NGUNI: SKIN-DRESSING

During the nineteenth century, skin-dressing and tailoring of skin clothing were widely practised activities, particularly during the winter months when the labour demands of agriculture were low. In addition hides were made into shields, sandals, milk-containers, bellows (an essential item of metal-working equipment) and bags of various kinds, each of which required specific technical skills. As a full ethnographic description of Southern Nguni skin-dressing, drawn largely from historical sources, has already been published (Shaw & Van Warmelo 1974: 165–185), only a summary will be given here with emphasis on the technical processes involved.

In both traditional skin-dressing and industrial tanning the process of transforming a raw skin or hide into a stable usable product involves a number of stages, during which the fresh skin is cured and treated with certain substances that have a stabilizing effect on the protein fibres that would otherwise be subject to rapid organic decay. At least four processes must take place before the skin is ready for use—these are drying or curing, cleaning, softening and currying, and treatment with fat to make the skin supple. With slight local variations the following method of preparing skins and hides was common throughout the Southern Nguni area.

Drying

Fresh skins were usually stretched out, flesh side upwards, fixed (*-bopelela*) to the ground with wooden pegs (*izikhonkwane*) and allowed to dry in the sun (Fig. 2). By reducing the moisture content of the skin in this way the likelihood



Fig. 2. Skin pegged out for cleaning; Libode, Transkei, 1985.

of bacterial action was minimized and, if completely dry, an unworked skin would remain stable for some time and could be stored until taken to the next stage of preparation.

A specialist craftsman practising in the King William's Town area in 1969 used salt to aid the drying process but this was not indicated in earlier accounts. In most cases it seems that cleaning followed fairly shortly after the skin had been stretched out and dried.

Cleaning and reducing thickness

After drying, large skins were suspended from the cross-beam of a vertical frame (Fig. 3), attached to the beam by thongs through the peg holes, or hung over the beam and pegged on either side at an angle to the ground. Smaller skins were pegged out, again horizontally, after the flesh side had been moistened with water and the hair on the underside smeared with fresh cow dung—said to be a good disinfectant (McLaren 1919: 447). In many accounts dung is recorded as having a softening, depilatory effect on the skin. Allowing a wet skin to rot for a few days had a similar result. Under correct conditions of temperature and acidity, enzymes present in dung act on the protein fibre of the epidermal structure to loosen the hair roots. This action, known as *bating* in the leather industry, also encourages flexibility of the skin.

The moistened flesh side of the skin was then scraped and pared (*-phala*) with an adze or axe blade (*isixengxe*) and rubbed with a rough stone (*uhlalutye*) to remove bits of flesh still adhering to the skin and to reduce its thickness and



Fig. 3. Frame used when cleaning large skins; Cat's Pass, Transkei, 1971.

unevenness. The paring down continued until the roots of the hair were just visible. This scraping and thinning process was arduous—cleaning a large skin constituted a full day's work for two men (McLaren 1919: 447). It was important that the scraping be carried out thoroughly, as any remaining fragments of flesh would later be converted into fatty acids and cause the skin to rot, rendering all the work useless. From Kay's (1833: 342) account, skin-workers seemed well aware of this and were generally very particular about this part of the operation. At this stage the skin was referred to as *umpalane*, the scraped; the scrapings were either cooked and eaten as a delicacy or were made into a particular kind of snuff-box (see p 347).

Softening and currying

The dried, scraped skin was usually handed over to the women for braying and currying. At least five or six women would co-operate in this activity (Kay 1833: 342), which firstly involved dampening the rigid skin again and trampling it by foot or pounding it with stones. It was then rubbed with rough stones and stretched out on the ground to be abraded (*-rwexwa*), and rubbed (*-kuhla*) with spiky aloe leaves, *imihlaba*, which gave the softened skin a raised nap. When the nap was of sufficient thickness the skin was left to dry indoors in a warm place. Thereafter the surface was dampened (*-gcabha*) with warm water, sour milk, a mixture of milk and ashes, or with mesembrianthemum juice, and was then curried again with aloe leaves (Campbell 1815: 369; Ross 1824: 215). In certain areas skins were partially tanned by applying an infusion of the bark and leaves of *Schotia latifolia* or *Pterocelastrus tricuspidatus* (Watt & Breyer-Brandwyk 1962: 184). When the dressed skin was dry the women rubbed it by hand until it was pliable.

Application of fat and colouring

The dry, softened skin was smeared with melted animal fat or butter on the hair-side, rolled into a tight bundle, and left overnight. Some skin-workers applied bone marrow or a mixture of brains soaked in hot water to the skin. The phosphate content of these substances would have had a preserving action on the protein fibres. The day after the fat had been applied the skin was moistened and rubbed again by hand to help the fat to penetrate and to increase the softness of the skin (Fig. 4). After repeated kneading, the skin was allowed to dry and was curried yet again with aloe leaves to create the desired smooth, woolly texture, *umhlapo*. According to Hunter (1936: 101) Mpondo skin-workers buried hides in the cattle byre for a night or more before the final currying by hand.

The final stage of the dressing process was to smear the nap side of the skin with a paste of ochre or other colourant, which adhered to the fat previously absorbed by the skin. A black dye (*ibiba*) was made from the ashes of the heartwood or bark of certain trees, powdered and rubbed into the skin. A red dye was obtained from the bark of *Schotia latifolia*. It is likely that the tanning properties



Fig. 4. Mfengu woman softening a skin; Fort Beaufort, Cape; by Baines 1848. (Africana Museum.)

of the plant extracts used traditionally in skin-dressing helped to stabilize and preserve the skins in domestic use.

Dressing of fur and hair

The above process produced supple skins free of hair. How the process differed when the hair was retained, is not clear from historical accounts. Adams (1839: 131) mentioned that when dressing 'tiger or other skins' they were spread out on grass, covered with sheep's fat and a kind of chalk, and then rubbed with an abrasive stone until soft. He noted that the hair remained undisturbed and there was no mention of dung or heat. This seems significant in that under certain conditions dung would have had the undesirable effect of loosening the hairs at the roots. No other information was recorded on the dressing or maintenance of furs.

Preparation of unsoftened hides

When intended for shields or sandals, a hide was only taken through the first two stages of preparation—those of being stretched out to dry and scraped clean. The hair was left on and the thickness of the hide was not pared down. It was allowed to dry hard, in which condition it was called *intlonze*. Thereafter it was cut into the required shape.

A shield-maker still active in the Mount Ayliff area in 1969 made small shields for young men engaging in stick fights. He wet the prepared skin before cutting it into an oval shape and making slits through which decorative strips were passed. At the back loops for the stick and a grip for holding the shield were made. As the shield dried it was hammered flat with a stone and fat was worked into it.

Xhosa craftsmen who worked with unsoftened hides not only made shields, but also sandals, quivers for spears, and warriors' headbands to which crane feathers were attached.

Throughout the Nguni area thongs and whipcords were made from unsoftened hides (*amathwathwa*). Before cutting, the skin was immersed in water. A long strip was then cut, starting from the outer edge of the hide and working around and around to the centre. The strip was then looped over a strong branch or specially constructed frame and the lower ends fastened to a piece of wood that



Fig. 5. Twisted thongs weighted with a heavy stone; Libode, Transkei, 1985.

was weighted with a heavy stone (Fig. 5). Another stick was used to wind the strip up as tightly as possible and was then removed to release the taut spiral. This winding and unwinding was repeated a number of times over a few days, by which time most of the hair had fallen off. Fat was then applied and, after a further two days on the frame, the thong was ready for use. A dressing of cream was used to keep thongs supple.

Cutting and sewing softened skins

Once a skin had been prepared for use, uneven edges were trimmed and any holes in the skin were carefully repaired (Adams 1839: 131). Cutting the skin to the required shape for particular items of clothing—for example, cloaks, head-dresses or aprons—was generally the work of a specialist, usually a woman among the Xhosa and Thembu, and a man among the Mpondo, Xesibe and Bhaca. In all areas the cutting and sewing of certain special garments, such as the leopard-skin cloak worn only by chiefs, was done by appointed craftsmen.

When cut to the appropriate shape the skin was returned to the owner for sewing. The thread used was made from sinew (*usinga*) obtained from dried tendons—preferably of game animals—that had been flattened with a stone, separated into strands of fibre, and rolled into thread by hand.

A metal awl (*isilanda*) was used to make small holes along the edges of the pieces to be joined and the thread was sewn through the holes in a continuous oversewing stitch. Fine, neat stitching is apparent on many examples of skin clothing preserved in museum collections. Döhne (1844: 40) recorded that, after sewing, the garment was dampened and stretched out in order to straighten and tighten the seams. Thereafter it was once again rubbed by hand, in conjunction with application of fat—or sour milk as was the Xhosa custom—and finally, if the skin had not been dyed previously, powdered ash, bark or ochre might be rubbed into the garment.

Practitioners

Both men and women participated in preparing skins for use. The initial stages of flaying the animal, pegging the skin out to dry, and scraping it clean were always carried out by men. Thereafter either men or women took the skin through the time-consuming processes of braying, currying, raising a nap (especially for skins intended for women's clothing), and working fat into the skin. Among the Xhosa it was customary practice for women to do most of the work after the skin had been scraped clean, and they also did the cutting and sewing of garments. Among the Mpondo, men were primarily responsible for skin-working but women gave occasional help. Thembu women curried the skins and worked up the nap and thereafter men worked in the fat and softened the skin by hand. Women tended to make the clothing for everyday wear and there was some degree of specialization in cutting garments. Men tended to specialize in making clothing for ceremonial purposes, as well as shields and other items made of unsoftened hide.

Co-operative labour was essential to the process of skin-dressing. Most accounts indicate that for a large skin at least two people, and usually more, worked on it at any stage of the process. The cleaning was said to be particularly hard work, taking two men a full day to complete. At the braying stage the whole village might participate intermittently over a period of several days. It is difficult to assess the time expended on the whole process because skin-working was interspersed with other domestic activities and at certain stages the skin could be set aside. Craftsmen still practising in the 1970s took between one and two weeks to prepare a cow-hide. Döhne (1844: 41) estimated that it took at least three to four weeks for a cloak to be completed but he gave no indication of the relative time spent on cutting, sewing and decorating.

At Engcobo in 1969, a Thembu woman working on her own took six months to prepare five goatskins and make them into a skirt. While this case may have been exceptional, it does indicate the possible investment of time by one individual in a single garment. To supply skin clothing for an extended family must have been demanding, not only in terms of resources but also in labour and time. Considering this, together with changing economic conditions during the nineteenth century, when the trade in raw hides increased and imported cotton blankets and cloth became more accessible (Beinart 1980: 137), it is not surprising that the domestic demand for dressed skins for clothing declined.

SOUTHERN NGUNI: USES OF SKINS AND HIDES

CLOTHING AND ORNAMENT

The synthesis presented here is based on historical and more recent ethnographic sources. As many of the relevant historical records and illustrations of clothing and ornament have already been published in the comprehensive volume by Shaw & Van Warmelo (1988), only selected references are quoted here and the figures complement rather than duplicate those previously published.

APRONS

Terms: *inciyo*—a woman's modesty apron, made of skin and ornamented with beads; *icacawe*—a woman's modesty apron, made of the small ends of *umkwinti* (Kropf 1915).

Throughout the Southern Nguni area, small skin aprons were essential items of dress for women. In an early account of Xhosa clothing, skin aprons were described as consisting of 'een stuk vel of eene franje van vellen' [a piece of skin or fringes of skin] (Van Plettenberg 1778: 48).

In the early nineteenth century a small skin apron was the only garment worn by a woman under her cloak. Although to the missionary Kay (1833: 114), an apron three to four inches broad and decorated with various coloured beads seemed to be worn 'more as an ornament than as a matter of decorum', it satisfied customary clothing requirements. Later in the nineteenth century these aprons were worn under long skirts (see pp. 340–343) and well into the twentieth century they continued to be worn as undergarments.

Skin aprons were mentioned by a number of observers in the nineteenth century, nearly all of whom commented on decoration with glass beads, buttons or brass rings (Lichtenstein [1810] 1928: 339; Hallbeck & Fritsch 1827: 303; Morgan 1833: 37; Alexander 1837: 391). A combination of blue and white, or black and white beads, seems to have been the earliest form of decoration, as illustrated in the drawings of early travellers and confirmed by museum specimens. Beaded aprons in the shape of a swallow-tail were recorded in the Xhosa area in the first half of the nineteenth century. These were probably worn over a fringed apron, as shown in an illustration by Bisset (1835; AFR 63/1550).

It should be noted that, even before cloth was available, not all aprons were made entirely of skin. Twisted plant fibre (*umkwinti*, *Gazania pinnata*) was very widely used to make fringed aprons (Soga 1932: 413).

BABY-SLINGS

Terms: *imbeleko*—the skin or blanket in which a baby is carried on a woman's back . . . ; *isibeleko*—a womb (Kropf 1915).

The skin of a goat, slaughtered as a ritual offering to the ancestors on the birth of a baby, was used to make an *imbeleko* sling (Fig. 6) for carrying the child on the mother's back. It was believed that the well-being of the child was associated with the use of the *imbeleko*, which was also used as a mat for the child to sit or sleep on. The fact that the term *imbeleko* derives from the same stem as *isibeleko*, meaning womb, suggests an association of meaning that underlines the symbolic, protective value of the baby-sling.

The *imbeleko* was often covered by the upper part of a skin cloak, tied at the waist and around the shoulders (Duggan-Cronin 1939, pl. 27).

BREAST-COVERINGS

Terms: *imbeka*—the small square of light skin that covers a woman's breast when at work or at home; *incebetha*—attire of beads used by women as a breast-covering; *ixhosa*—a dressed hide, especially the covering made from it and worn over the breasts by females (Kropf 1915).

Before the nineteenth century, breast-coverings were not mentioned in the literature. Barrow (1806: 152) stated explicitly that Xhosa women wore nothing whatsoever under their cloaks except a little apron. From about the second decade of the nineteenth century, references to breast-coverings occur in the records. In the 1820s Kay (1833: 114) observed that it was 'accounted exceedingly unbecoming for a female to go about with her breasts uncovered . . . therefore, she wears the *imbeka* which is also ornamented with beads'. Later records confirm that married women wore a piece of softened skin over the breasts (King 1853: 169; Steedman 1835: 260; Thompson 1827: 58).

Breast-coverings varied somewhat in form. Alberti (1810: 32) recorded a square-shaped 'net' and Soga (1932: 236, 242) described the *incebetha* as a 'bodice' made from the stomach membrane of ruminating animals and adorned with a beaded fringe. King's description (1853: 169) of a 'small forked apron of leather' is confirmed by nineteenth-century illustrations and an early museum specimen (BM 4587, Transkei, 1867). Breast-coverings were often decorated with long



Fig. 6. Hlubi woman holding her child. The skin *imbeleko* around her shoulders is used for carrying the baby on her back, c. 1930. (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)

fringes of beads attached to the upper edge. Later examples show that cloth eventually replaced skin but the bead ornamentation remained relatively unchanged.

A special antelope-skin breast-covering worn by pregnant women was recorded among the Mfengu by Tyrrell (1968: 177), who suggested that the use of this 'maternity apron' is a remnant of Northern Nguni material culture that was retained. In other respects Mfengu dress is more akin to that of the Xhosa.

In the 1930s Hunter recorded that skin breast-coverings were worn by Mpondo women. By the 1970s, when fieldwork for this study was being conducted, skins had ceased to be used but those married women who still adhered to traditional dress wore a breast-covering made from towelling or heavy cotton cloth, *ibhayi*.

CLOAKS

Terms: *umnweba*—a garment of different colours, made of the skins of various kinds of small animals; *ingubo*—a garment, kaross, cloak, robe . . . (Kropf 1915).

Cloaks made from the skins of game animals or from the hides of cattle, were worn throughout the Southern Nguni area by both men and women.

Men's cloaks were usually just wide enough to close in front and on many occasions were worn open, hanging loosely to the back from the shoulders or over one shoulder. The fur side of the cloak was folded back at the neck to form a rolled collar, which showed off the quality of the pelt. This was particularly noticeable in the case of chiefs' cloaks that were either trimmed with or made entirely of leopard skin (Fig. 7).

The women's cloaks, which attracted the attention of many observers, were fuller and of a different cut from those worn by men; they were also often decorated with metal studs, trinkets, a cosmetic box, or with small animal skins (Alberti 1810: 31–32; Steedman 1835: 243; Shaw 1860: 408). A simpler cloak was also worn by women, probably on less formal occasions. Early illustrations show that, in general, cloaks were worn with the hair on the inside, but there were a number of different ways of draping them around the body.

Women's voluminous cloaks were made either from a single large skin with additional pieces of skin inserted to give the required width, or from three or four panels of antelope or cattle skin cut to give a semi-flared shape. The panels were sewn together with twisted sinew thread, *umsonto*, and then dampened to allow the seams to be drawn tightly together when dry. The garment was curried by hand, rubbed with fat, and usually dyed black with powdered heartwood or mimosa bark. At this stage a new cloak was called *igcabhe*.

A characteristic feature of Xhosa, Thembu and Mfengu women's cloaks was a long strip of hide, *isibhaca*, attached to the back of the neck and reaching the full length of the cloak (Fig. 8). This flap, about 30 cm wide, was made from a number of small pieces of hide carefully sewn together and, unlike the rest of the cloak, it was worn with the hairy side outwards. It was usually studded ornately with round or flat brass buttons. Variations in the richness of decoration on this



Fig. 7. Xhosa Paramount Chief wearing a cloak trimmed with leopard skin, c. 1930. (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)

feature of the cloak allowed differences in wealth and status to be made apparent. As Soga (1932: 412) remarked it was a 'show piece'.

One of the few nineteenth-century cloaks preserved in a museum (BM 4591, Transkei, 1867), is of semicircular shape with a strip of hide, ornamented with six rows of brass buttons, hanging down the back. In addition the strip is flanked on both sides with long iron chains, and a tortoise shell is attached by means of a strip of leather covered with brass rings. A cloak illustrated by Angas (1849) has similar ornamental details.

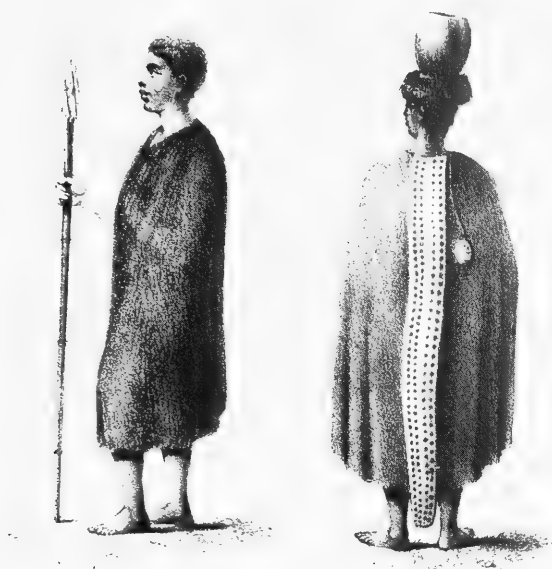


Fig. 8. Thembu man and woman, showing cloak with decorated panel at back. (Gardiner 1836.)

The most common manner of wearing the tailored cloak was wrapped completely around the body and closed at the neck, or open just a little to reveal the top of a beaded breast-covering. A lighter cloak or wrap was worn in a number of different ways—tied at the neck, under the arms across the breast, or rolled down to the waist. A light cloak could also be tied at the waist and across the shoulders to provide a carrier for a baby on the back (Campbell 1815: 369; I'Ons 1849). It is likely that the lighter, multipurpose cloaks were everyday dress, whereas the tailored, decorated cloaks were more formal. The latter were recorded only in the west of the Southern Nguni area; they were not recorded among the Mpondo, who were said to wear unadorned simple cloaks (Bain 1829: 103).

Children wore skin cloaks that were diminutive unornamented versions of those worn by adults. Sheepskin cloaks, with the wool inwards, were worn by herd-boys (Fig. 9) and by initiates living in seclusion in the cold winter months. Among the Xhosa in the Tshabo area, initiates' cloaks were made by specialists, two of whom were still practising in 1969. For one cloak up to 10 sheepskins were cleaned and softened individually before being cut and sewn together with sinew thread.

Among the Thembu the white sheepskins used for an initiate's cloak were prepared by his father and sewn by his mother. The cloak was worn by the initiate throughout his seclusion and, according to Broster (1967: 134), after circumcision the prepuce was sewn or tied to the cloak, which was eventually burnt—together



Fig. 9. Thembu herd-boys wearing sheepskin cloaks, c. 1930. (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)

with the lodge—at the ritual closing of the school. The white of the cloak and the white clay with which initiates smeared their bodies, symbolized their transitional status to adulthood and their temporary separation from the community.

Fur cloaks or capes were used by diviners. A Thembu example is made up of the pelts of many different animals, including wild-cat (F. S. Malan Museum, Fort Hare: Hamilton Welsh Collection 617, Cofimvaba, 1937). The choice of skin for diviners' clothing was often determined by visions experienced by the diviner (Bigalke 1966: 9).

Fur cloaks were also used on ceremonial occasions, such as the installation of a chief, by the *imbongi* (Fig. 10), who recited praises in the chief's honour.

A small cape, *isidabane*, made of a complete antelope skin was worn by Xhosa men for ceremonial dances or celebrations such as weddings. During the



Fig. 10. *Imbongi* wearing fur cloak at installation of Chief Ndamase, Pondoland, Transkei, 1979.

nineteenth century it was worn as a cape by warriors performing war-dances and around the waist when fighting (see p. 339).

GIRDLES

Terms: *ingcengce*—a girdle or waistband; *igqesha*—a girdle, band, napkin, bound about the waist (Kropf 1915).

Ties of skin or thong were attached to aprons, and simple leather girdles were worn by women to gather in their cloaks at the waist (Campbell 1815: 369). In addition to these essentially functional waistbands, there were decorative girdles and belts adorned with metal or glass beads and other trinkets (Lichtenstein [1810] 1928: 339; Shaw & Van Warmelo 1988: 676).

In times of food shortage both men and women are said to have fastened belts tightly around the waist to allay hunger (King 1853: 197).

HEAD-DRESSES

Terms: *umnqwazi*—a covering for the head of women; being a high cap made of skin trimmed with beads; *unkontsho*—a woman's head-dress, a mitre; *isidlokolo*—cap of baboon's skin; *isila*—appendage of blue-buck skin on a woman's cap; lappet, sash; *isindwe*—a collection of crane's feathers, used by warriors as a head-dress . . . (Kropf 1915).

Early travellers in the west of the Southern Nguni area noted that among the Xhosa and Thembu a characteristic feature of married women's attire was the wearing of elaborate head-dresses. Among the people living in the east, head-dresses were not noted but hair-styles and hair ornaments were prominent. It is likely, however, that throughout the area young married women would have followed the custom of *hlonipha*, which required that they cover their heads modestly

and screen their eyes as a token of respect for their husbands (Gitywa 1971: 115). Among the Bhaca the skin used for a newly married woman's head-covering (Fig. 11) came from a special goat provided by her father-in-law as part of the ceremonial exchanges between the two families (Hammond-Tooke 1962: 111).

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century illustrations indicate that head-coverings were either a softened piece of skin tied around the head to form a simple turban or a very distinctive sewn and beaded head-dress also made of skin (see Shaw & Van Warmelo 1988, pls 68–72).

The beaded head-dress, *umnqwazi* (Figs 12, 13), recorded only among the Xhosa and Thembu, was like a tapered bag with the narrow end tucked under the bands that held it in position on the head. It was made from a number of tapered panels of skin, which had been appropriately prepared and then oversewn (Fig. 14A) with sinew thread along the length and narrow ends.



Fig. 11. Bhaca bride wearing *hlonipha* head-dress, c. 1930. (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)



Fig. 12. Woman wearing *umnqwazi* head-dress. Note also decorated panel on cloak. (Baines 1836, original in S.A. National Gallery.)

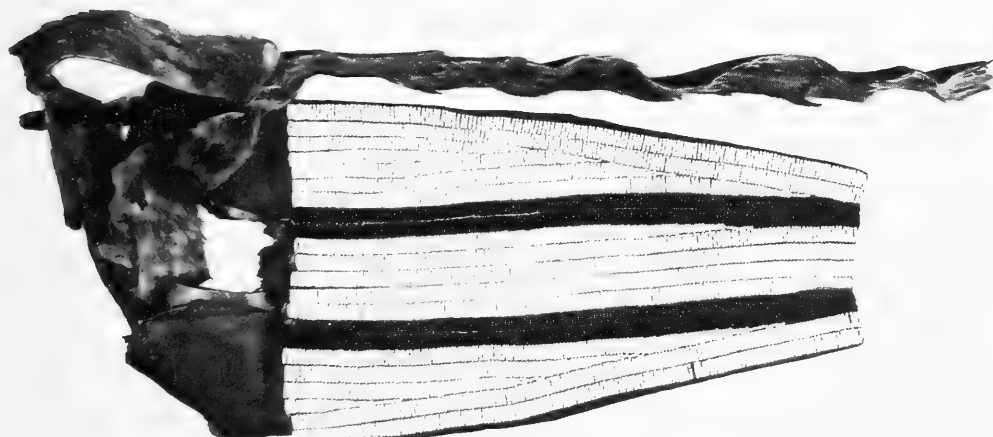


Fig. 13. *Umnqwazi* head-dress; SAM-5918, Transkei, 1938.

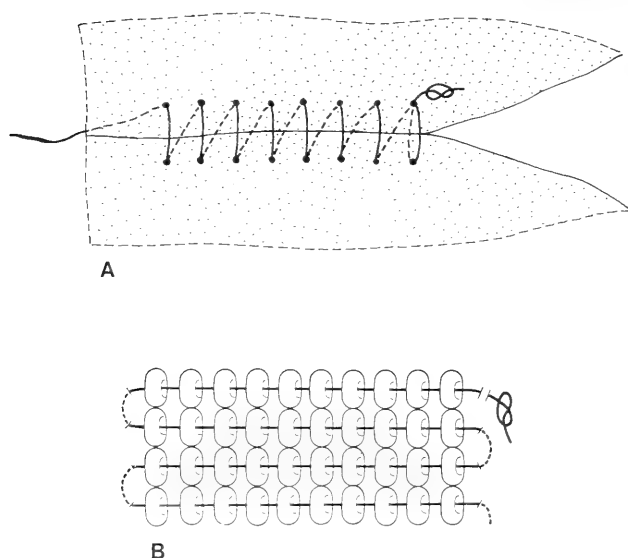


Fig. 14. A. Detail of oversewing on *umnqwazi* head-dress. B. Detail of lazy-stitch beadwork technique used to ornament the head-dress.

Bands for securing the head-dress were later sewn to the side panels. A piece of wood was placed inside the head-dress to give it the correct shape and then it was buried. After being removed, it was sprinkled with milk and softened by hand (Döhne 1844: 41). Beads were sewn on in narrow bands of 'lazy stitch' (Fig. 14B) down the length of the head-dress.

Skins from the bushbuck, *imbabala*, and the blue duiker, *iphuthi*, were selected for making these head-dresses (Alberti 1810: 32; Thompson 1827: 358; Kay 1833: 144). The rarity of bluebuck skin made it highly valued, but even more distinguished was the use of leopard skin—a privilege accorded only to the wives of chiefs (King 1853: 63). The richness of bead decoration was another indicator of status. In the early nineteenth century, shells and pieces of polished copper and iron were used together with relatively few glass beads sewn along the seams but, by the third decade of the century, head-dresses were profusely beaded with white and black, or white and blue beads (Barrow 1806: 120; Phillips 1827: 192; Morgan 1833: 38; Alexander 1837: 390).

There seem to have been slight variations in the manner of wearing the head-dress but in all cases the beadwork ornamentation was shown off to advantage, and early illustrations show long lappets of antelope skin further adorning the head-dress (Gordon 1776; Sonnerat 1782). The careful choice of skin as well as the tailoring and ornamentation of the head-dresses reflected the value attached to these 'most expensive articles of clothing' (Kay 1833: 114). After the mid-nineteenth century these head-dresses seem to have been used less regularly and

by the end of the nineteenth century the distinctive *umnqwazi* had given way to other forms of head-dress made of cloth. It has remained customary, however, for Xhosa and Thembu married women who wear traditional dress to keep their heads covered (Bigalke 1972: 71).

A distinctive fur cap, *isidlokolo*, often made from baboon or monkey skin, formed part of the costume worn by diviners, both male and female (Fig. 15). This head-dress was often trimmed with a fringed band of white beadwork.



Fig. 15. Xhosa diviners' costumes, c. 1930. (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)

Inflated gall-bladders attached to a headband were also characteristically worn by diviners. This form of head-dress is well illustrated in a study of a Bhaca diviner by Duggan-Cronin (Fig. 16).

A hide headband to which the long wings of the blue crane were attached, was worn only by Xhosa warriors whose bravery had been recognized by the chief. This distinctive *isindwe* head-dress, with horn-like appearance, was worn into battle (Morgan 1833: 37). Many early nineteenth-century illustrations show warriors wearing the crane-feather head-dress but, with the termination of the frontier wars, it had become obsolete by the end of the century.



Fig. 16. Bhaca diviner, wearing head-dress of gall-bladders and goatskin bandoliers, c. 1930 (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)

LOIN-COVERINGS AND PENIS-SHEATHS

Terms: *inxiba*—penis cap; *isidla sokugqishela*—a small bag to cover the penis; *isidabane*—the skin of the *ula* [oribi], *impunzi* [duiker] or *iliza* [rhebok] . . . used as dress in fighting parties, or in dances at marriage feasts; . . . it is bound round the loins of fighters (Kropf 1915).

Late eighteenth-century illustrations (Gordon 1776; Van Plettenberg 1778) show men wearing small aprons of skin attached to a waist girdle, but by far the most widely recorded item of men's clothing was the penis-sheath. This was required dress for all men past the age of adolescence (Barrow 1806: 167; Moodie 1835: 247; Cook 1931: 162; Shaw & Van Warmelo 1988: 520).

Although by the turn of the century western dress had been widely adopted, conservative Bhaca men continued to wear a penis-sheath under trousers because they felt 'naked' without it (Hammond-Tooke 1958: 17).

Penis-sheaths (Fig. 17) were made from many different kinds of skin, including that of intestine or pericardium, as well as from other materials such as



Fig. 17. Penis-sheath; SAM-9429, King William's Town, 1968.

cocoons, fruit-shells and woven grass. The skin had to be carefully softened and sewn to the required shape. The sewing was often done by women but Mpondo men were said to sew their own sheaths. In some cases the hair was left on the outside and additional ornamental strips or tails of hide were attached, as were beads or other decorative trimmings.

During the nineteenth century a larger loin-covering made of antelope skin was wrapped around the hips when men were at war or involved in fighting. This was the *isidabane* (see p. 333), which at other times was worn as a small cape tied around the neck (Alberti 1810: 31; Morgan 1833: 37).

SANDALS

Terms: *isihlangu*—a sandal cut out of the thick part of a skin; a thing that protects; a shield; *imbadada*—a sandal (Kropf 1915).

Generally men and women preferred to go barefoot. Sandals were worn, however, when going on a long journey and traversing rugged paths or when hunting. Men often carried a pair of sandals on the end of a stick or behind a shield in readiness should the road become rough (Van der Kemp 1804: 440).

The sandals consisted of a sole of heavy hide secured by thongs tied around the foot and between the big toe or by an upper piece of leather that left only the toes exposed.

Sandals were made by the craftsmen who also made shields and quivers. Generally the unsoftened hide of an ox or a game animal was used. McLaren (1919: 448) noted specifically that skin from the forehead of an ox was used by

Xhosa sandal-makers. The sole was cut to the shape of the foot, allowing about one centimetre extra width all round. Additional pieces of skin stitched to the sides and back of the sole formed the uppers, which were tied together with a thong when the sandal was worn.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, shoes similar to the 'veldt schoen' used by Dutch colonists were in use (Shaw 1860: 417).

SKIRTS

Terms: *isikhaka*—a short skirt made of skin; a petticoat; *umthika*—a tail, skirt, long garment . . . (Kropf 1915).

Many records from the early nineteenth century refer to a 'kind of petticoat of leather' worn by married women around the waist. From illustrations (Thompson 1827: 358; Shaw 1840: 57) it seems that this skirt may have been formed by rolling a light cloak down at the waist and securing it so that it hung to just below the knees (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18. Xhosa woman wearing skirt and breast-cloth. (Bell c. 1834, Cape Archives.)

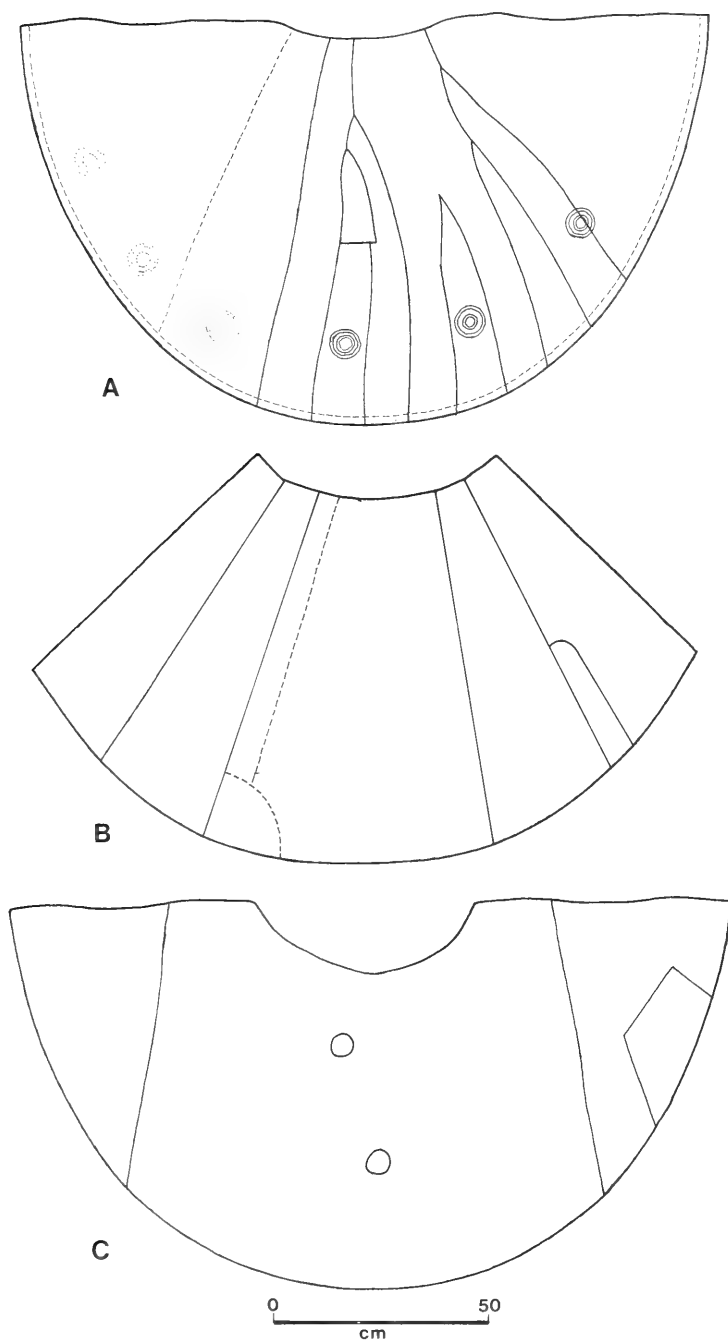


Fig. 19. Patterns of skin skirts. A. NASKO 35/492, Thembu, Xalanga district, 1935. B. SAM-9584, Thembu, Engcobo, 1969. C. EL 4793, Gcaleka, Qora River, 1967.

Later in the nineteenth century, skin skirts styled on the line of European fashion came into use, especially among Xhosa and Thembu women. These were cut and sewn to a semicircular flare (Fig. 19A–C), achieved either by joining a number of tapered panels as in the case of two Thembu skirts (NASKO 35/492, Xalanga, 1935; SAM-9584, Encobo, 1969), or by adding shaped side panels to a straight-seamed central panel as in a Gcaleka skirt (EL 4794, Qora River, 1967). By inseting shaped pieces the tailor could correct irregularities in the skin or patch holes.

Cattle-hide seems to have been the most frequently used material, but goat-skin was also used. Sinew thread was used for the fine oversewing that joined the seams. To colour a skirt, red ochre mixed with fat was rubbed into the hide.

The skirt was worn wrapped around the body and was tied at the waist with a girdle. The skirt generally reached the ankles (Fig. 20) and if the hair was left on the skin it was worn inwards.



Fig. 20. Thembu woman wearing a skin skirt, 1935. (National Cultural History and Open-air Museum.)

It was customary for a man to provide his wife with a skin skirt soon after the occasion of their marriage and thereafter an *isikhaka* became her habitual dress. By the mid-twentieth century, skin skirts were worn primarily on ceremonial occasions, having been replaced for everyday use by cotton skirts of similar shape, which had the advantage of being easier to acquire and less heavy to wear.

In the east of the Southern Nguni area, Mpondo and Bhaca women wore skirts that consisted of two pieces of goatskin wrapped around the body so that the back skirt overlapped the front. The skirt was supported at the waist by a girdle.

A special 'skirt' or kilt, *imithika*, made of tails or strips of animal skins formed part of the ceremonial dress worn by diviners. The kilt was generally worn over another garment wrapped around the hips. The costume and accessories of Xhosa and Thembu diviners are illustrated by Broster (1976: 96–98; 1982).

ORNAMENTS

Terms: *inquma*—a head ornament [of skin]; *inqashela*—piece of skin used as a legging; *ingcaca*—cowrie shells used as an ornamental band on the foreheads of men; *intshinga*—ornament of tassel-like appearance made from the tufted end of a jackal's or hartebeest's tail, worn by men on the head or on the calf in dancing and hunting (Kropf 1915).

Hide, skin or fur formed part of a variety of ornaments worn on ceremonial occasions. Certain of these ornaments were indicators of status, office or prestige; others had protective attributes.

Headbands of hide ornamented with much favoured cowrie shells, pieces of copper, or glass beads were among the wide range of ornaments worn by men in the Southern Nguni area (see Shaw & Van Warmelo 1988: 664).

Chief Ngqika wore a narrow hide headband decorated with black and white beads sewn in a triangular design (Kay 1833: 42). Apart from richness of ornamentation and the exclusive use of leopard skin and ivory, it seems that there was little distinction between the dress of chiefs and commoners. Very little, however, is known about the association of particular ornaments or accoutrements with social status. Carmichael's (1831: 288) comment that the 'head ornaments of men are as varied as they are fanciful. A tuft of hair from the rump of a springbok, a string of nerite shells, a fillet of monkey skin . . . ' gives no indication of social context.

A number of ornaments made entirely or partly of skin are preserved in museum collections. Headbands (*inquma*) made from the tail hair of a monkey twined together with fibre cord, are said to have been worn by senior Bomvana men and women (EL 5368, Elliotdale, 1969; DC 1284, no locality or date). The *inquma* was also worn by Xhosa headmen, and a Thembu example (Fig. 21) is recorded as having been worn by women on special occasions.

Skin formed the foundation material for a number of beaded ornaments worn around legs or arms, and pieces of fur were used as ornaments on cloaks or made into anklets without any additional adornment. Tassels of skin and tails, especially from game animals, gave dramatic effect to ceremonial occasions when worn around the waist, arms or legs (Holden [1866] 1963: 232).



Fig. 21. Headband of tail hair; NASKO 35/347. Thembu, Mqanduli, 1935.

Diviners generally wore clothing and ornaments that distinguished them from the rest of the community. Fur of certain animals and feathers from a variety of birds formed part of a diviner's costume. The choice of animal or bird was usually revealed to the diviner in a dream and was thereafter associated with the calling of the spirits.

In general, armbands or anklets made from the skin of animals sacrificed to the ancestors were worn as amulets for curing purposes rather than as decorative ornaments. The tail hairs from a special ox or cow, the *ubulunga* beast, associated with the ancestors, were made into necklets believed to have protective, healing properties for the wearer and to prevent misfortune.

GENERAL

Burial custom required that the clothes and ornaments of a deceased person be buried with the body (Holman 1834: 265). In the case of a chief his cloak was used as a shroud and the cloaks and other possessions of his wives were also buried (Shaw 1860: 431). The mourners lived in seclusion for some time and thereafter cattle were slaughtered to provide the skins for new clothing.

CONTAINERS

BAGS

Terms: *inxowa*—a bag, usually made of the skin of a kid flayed whole; *inxili*—a bag for pipe and tobacco worn on the side by women; a bag full of all kinds of goods; *itasi*—a bag or satchel carried by a strap over the shoulders (Kropf 1915).

A bag, *inxowa* (Fig. 22), made from the entire skin of a goat or small buck with the hair on the inside, was widely used by men for carrying pipes, tobacco and other personal possessions. As there was a tendency for articles to get lost in the 'legs' of the bag, a pouch for small items was often kept inside the *inxowa*.

When fieldwork was being done in the late 1960s *inxowa* bags were still being made and used. Those of young men tended to be beaded, whereas those of older men were plain. Application of fat and ochre maintained the bags in a supple condition.



Fig. 22. Thembu chief carrying an *inxowa*, c. 1930. (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)

Another type of bag, *itasi*, was made from a number of skins, often small antelope or wild cat, sewn together with fine thongs or sinew thread. The *itasi* always had a shoulder strap, usually made of leather purchased at the local store. Both men and women used these bags for a variety of personal possessions.

A bag, made from the scrotum of a goat, was used by men as a tobacco pouch (UCT 23/175, Pondoland, 1923) and small decorative leather purses attached to belts were used by both men and women for holding money (SAM-989, Herschel, 1908; NASKO 35/343, Mqanduli, 1935; SAM-9398, King William's Town, 1968).

Diviners used fur bags (Fig. 23), often made from the skins of monkeys, civet cats or genets, to hold a variety of ingredients for medicines, small horns and other accoutrements.

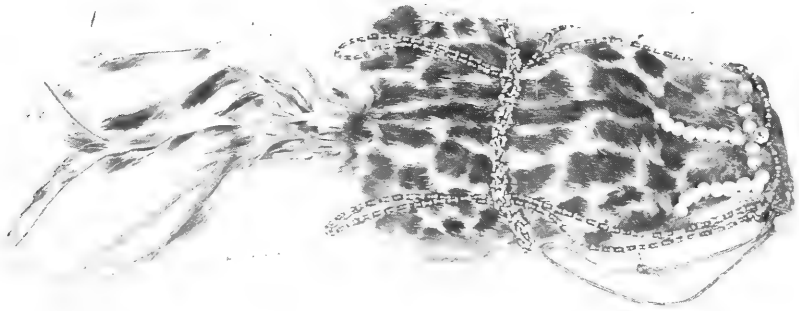


Fig. 23. Diviner's bag: NASKO 656, Mfengu, no date.

MILK-SACKS

Terms: *invaba*—leather milk sack with bottle-like neck, in which sweet milk is fermented and curdled (Kropf 1915).

Throughout the Nguni area sour milk formed an important part of the diet. Fresh milk was allowed to ferment in either a skin bag or a calabash vessel. Large milk-sacks were made from oxhides, smaller ones from the skin of a goat, calf or



Fig. 24. Milk-sack: DC 35, Thembu, Transkei, no date.

small buck. The hair was completely removed from the skin, which was carefully cleaned and cured. The sack (Fig. 24) was generally formed by folding in half a large piece of skin from the neck end of the animal and stitching it along the edges of the three open sides, allowing the neck to form the opening of the sack, which was fitted with a wooden stopper. Within the homestead, milk-sacks were kept inside the great house, underlining the symbolic association of milk from the herd with the authority structure of the household.

QUIVERS

Term: *ikhohlombe*—the case or sheath in which assegais are carried (Kropf 1915).

Quivers for spears were made from unsoftened hide shaped and sewn to form a cylinder, usually between 300 mm and 700 mm in length (Shaw & Van Warmelo 1981: 326). The base was closed either by sewing the edges together or by inserting and over-sewing a circular piece of hide to plug the opening. A thong or strap was attached to the other end to facilitate carrying the quiver from the shoulder.

SNUFF-BOXES

Terms: *iqhaga*—snuff-box; any small box or case which is carried on the person (Kropf 1915).

In the nineteenth century, distinctive snuff-boxes were made from the scrapings removed during the skin-dressing process. These skin scrapings, called *imbumba yamanyama*, were mixed with blood and a little clay to form a thick paste. The shape of the snuff-box was modelled in clay and allowed to dry in the sun. The prepared paste was then smeared over the model, which was often in the form of a small animal. While still soft the surface of the paste was picked over with a needle to create the impression of hair. After drying, a hole was made in the surface and the clay removed from the inside. The small container was then fitted with a stopper (Fleming 1856: 204).

It is not clear when this technique ceased to be used. Few museum specimens are accurately dated but most date to the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

SHIELDS

Terms: *isihlangu*—a shield; *ingweletshetshe*—a small shield used to cover the face in hunting (Kropf 1915).

Large oval shields (Fig. 25) made of oxhide were used in both warfare and hunting. Shields could also provide shade from the sun and protection from cold weather. On occasion they were beaten as drums.

Xhosa war shields were large enough to conceal the body when crouching. Shields with lengths of up to 1,5 m and width of 0,8 m were mentioned in early accounts, and their shape was a blunt oval rather than the pointed oval found east of the Umzimvubu River and further north (Shaw & Van Warmelo 1981: 328–334).

A distinctive feature of shields was the central detailing consisting of vertical rows of slits through which hide of a contrasting colour was threaded. At the back thongs attached to these strips held a long stick in position and provided a grip.



Fig. 25. Warriors carrying shields in scene from the frontier war, c. 1852, by Baines. Note also the crane feather head-dresses. (Africana Museum.)

It is probable that differences in the colour of shields or variation in shape and detailing would have indicated regional or regimental association, but there is little information on this subject in the historical records.

With the advent of firearms, hide shields became increasingly obsolete as a method of defence. By the end of the nineteenth century they had ceased to be in general use.

Costume shields used on ceremonial occasions have continued to be used to the present time.

THONGS. BINDINGS AND THREADS

Terms: *intambo*—a thong, rope, *riem*; *ulutya*—a long thong; *usinga*—thread made from *umsundulo*, the tendons found on the underside of an ox's shoulder-blade (Kropf 1915).

Thongs made from unsoftened hide were used for a variety of purposes, mainly related to the handling and inspanning of cattle. It is possible that the method of making thongs by weighting and twisting a strip of hide from a branch or frame (see pp. 324–325) was learnt from the colonists and practised more generally after the 1860s, when the use of oxen as draught animals became widespread. The use of thongs for whipcords and for yoking teams of oxen to sledges and ploughs continues to the present time.

A hide strap was and still is used to tie the back legs of a cow during milking. According to a Xhosa proverb, inseparable friends are *yintambo neunga*, i.e. like the *riem* and the milk pail (Kropf 1915: 602). Thongs were also used as bridles and girths for pack-oxen (Shaw & Van Warmelo 1981, pl. 37).

Thinner cords of dressed skin were used as ties on garments and for sewing hide sandals and milk-sacks. For finer sewing of skin garments carefully prepared sinew thread was used (see p. 325).

A section of skin from the tail of a beast was used for attaching a spearhead to the shaft. The skin 'sleeve', put on when wet and flexible, dried hard to give a secure join. The same method was used to strengthen weak parts of a spear-shaft. Fine thongs were also used for binding the join between spearhead and shaft.

MISCELLANEOUS

BELLOWS

Term: *imfutho*—bellows (Kropf 1915).

Goatskins were used for making the air-bags of bellows used by metal smiths. Moodie (1835: 258) described the bellows as consisting of two goatskins joined at the neck ends to a tuyère, through which the air passed to the furnace.

INSIGNIA

Term: *umsila*—the tail of an animal; messenger of a chief . . . (Kropf 1915).

The tails of elephant and leopard were royal insignia. When placed on a roof or attached to a pole, the tails marked the homesteads of chiefs.

A staff bearing the tail of a leopard, and later that of a white ox, was carried by the messengers of chiefs as a sign of authority (Hunter 1936: 417). So close was the association of royal messengers with the leopard-tail staff-of-office that they were referred to as 'tails', *imisila*, when executing official duties such as exacting fines for misdeeds.

MATS

The cleaned skins of calves, goats and sheep were used as mats for sitting and sleeping on. Sheepskins were used particularly for babies and, in general, men tended to use skins for mats (Fig. 26), whereas women used grass mats. Women diviners, however, used skin mats.

Skin mats were also placed under grinding-stones when snuff or medicines were being prepared.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Terms: *ingqongqo*—a dried bullock skin; *amanqashele*—ankle rattles from goatskin (Kropf 1915).

An oxhide 'drum' or percussion board was used throughout the Southern Nguni area. The dried hide was stretched out between poles so that the surface was about a metre above the ground, and the performers beat it with sticks (Kirby 1934: 20). Alternatively a number of women would hold the skin in one hand and beat it with sticks held in the other, while singing at the same time.

The *ingqongqo* was used primarily to accompany the dancing of initiates, the hide having come from a bull specially slaughtered for the purpose. Drums were also beaten to accompany the dancing of diviners and during the initiation of diviners.



Fig. 26. Cleaned goatskins used by men as mats; Libode, Transkei, 1984.

Shields were used as drums by warriors and to accompany certain dances.

According to Kirby (1934: 8), ankle rattles made of goatskin were used by Xhosa initiates when dancing.

WHISKS

Terms: *itshoba*—the bushy end of an animal's tail, *uswazi*—a switch (Kropf 1915).

The tails of cattle and certain game animals made into whisks are among the accessories used by diviners to evoke the spirit world. The staff of the whisk is often decorated with beads.

NATAL NGUNI: SKIN-DRESSING

The processes involved in the preparation of hides and skins from large and small animals differ according to the relative robustness of the hide. Certain antelope, such as bushbuck (*inkenka*), bushduiker (*umkhumbi* or *nsumpe*), kudu (*umgankla*) and nyala (*inxala*), were noted for the toughness of their hides (Lugg 1971: 24). Oxhide is stronger than cowhide, which in turn is stronger than calf; the skin of a stillborn calf is the softest. Goatskin is a firm skin that, although in some ways comparable with sheepskin, is much stronger (Reed 1972: 43–44).

Drying

The first step in stabilizing a skin is to reduce moisture and inhibit bacterial activity. Skins were dried for about one day by stretching them flat on the ground, flesh side up, and pegging them down with small wooden pegs (*isikhonkwane*)

driven into slits made around the edge of the skin (Champion [1835–9] 1967: 43; Angas 1849, pl. 21; fieldwork KwaZulu, 1969–71). Once thus cured the hide could be stored until further work on it was convenient.

Cleaning

For cleaning off any remaining flesh or blood, the cured hide was usually again pegged to the ground (Champion [1835–9] 1967: 43; fieldwork KwaZulu 1969–71). It could also be stretched and pegged to the ground on either side of a framework consisting of a cross-bar supported by two approximately metre-high forked sticks (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 273), or stretched and tied to stout pegs that raised it off the ground (Vaughan-Kirby 1918: 36–37) (Fig. 27). Some practitioners soaked the skin before starting the process of scraping (*-phala*) with a metal axe- or adze-blade (*izembe*, *imbaza*) or rough stone, but all kept the skin moistened while working (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 273; Vaughan-Kirby 1918: 37; Bryant 1949: 403; Tugela Ferry, 1969). On weak skins, such as sheepskin, scraping was less vigorous. Scraping also reduced the thickness of the hide. It was a laborious process that required special skill to avoid damaging the hide with the sharp metal tools (Reed 1972: 53).



Fig. 27. Skin-worker scraping a stretched skin with an *indlwandlwa*; Natal, nineteenth century. (Mariannhill Mission.)

Softening and currying

When cleaned, the flesh side of strong skins and hides was scraped back and forth with thorny aloe (*umhlaba*) leaves or with a special spiked tool (*indlwandlwa* or *isihlabe*) consisting of nails bound together or fixed to a wooden base (Fynn

[1824–61] 1950: 273; Champion [1835–39] 1967: 43; Vaughan-Kirby 1918: 38–39; Bryant 1949: 403; Ingwavuma, 1970). This process softened the hide and at the same time produced a fine nap (*umsendo*). It was turned and pegged again and, if desired, the hair was scraped off with an adze. A later method recorded was to apply salt and pluck out the hair by hand (Bergville, 1969). Sheepskin was generally used with the wool retained.

Further softening treatment involved various substances such as sour milk or beer dregs, or the crushed kernels of *umtunduluku* (*Ximenia caffra*) or *inhlakuva* (*Ricinus communis*), or recently, commercial soap (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 273; Vaughan-Kirby 1918: 39–40; Bryant 1949: 403; Watt & Breyer-Brandwijk 1962: 39, 101; Berglund 1976: 346; Nongoma, 1971). One of these oily substances was spread on the hide, which was then rolled up with green leaves and set aside for a few days to allow absorption in the moist heat. The lipids made the hide more durable, especially in increasing resistance to water, and more supple, preventing cracking (Reed 1972: 65–67). Dung was applied to sheepskin and calfskin as a softening agent. Final softening was done by rubbing (*-shuka*) the hide in the hands.

Application of fat and colouring

The use of vegetable and animal fats in the softening process replaced some of the natural oils in the skin that were lost during drying and cleaning. In addition milk curds or animal fat, notably pig fat in recent times (Bulwer, Bergville, 1969), was rubbed into the prepared hide by hand. In some areas colour was applied by mixing red ochre (*ibomvu*) with the fat (Mayr 1907: 634). For skirts the hide was blackened with soot (see p. 364).

Dressing of fur and hair

Special techniques were required to dress fur, which was more delicate than other skins. No description of these techniques was found in the historical or ethnographic literature, although the use of monkey and wild-cat skins was often recorded. In the Bergville area in 1969, a practitioner working with rock-rabbit (*imbila*) skins cleaned the pelt by rubbing the flesh side with a stone and washed the entire skin with soap and water. It was softened by rubbing in the hands, and coloured by brushing on an infusion of wattle bark. The wattle tree had been introduced to Natal for its tanning properties. No dung or fats were used to soften the skin as these would have had a damaging effect on the fur.

Preparation of unsoftened hides

Where durability and rigidity were required the dressing of hides was modified but some degree of processing was essential to make the hide usable. Oxhide for shields was treated in the following way. The dried hide was buried in manure in the cattle byre for about a day (Krige 1950: 402; Bulwer, 1969; Tugela Ferry and Hlabisa, 1970). In this process, known industrially as 'bating', bacterial

enzymes act on the hide to clean and make it more flexible (Reed 1972: 55). The hide was further cleaned by rubbing and beating with stones (Champion [1835–9] 1967: 107; Bulwer, 1969; Tugela Ferry, Melmoth, Nongoma and Hlabisa, 1970). Thus, while making the hide stable and ready for cutting to shape, the more vigorous methods of cleaning and softening were avoided. The hair was cleaned with a soapy preparation of the plant *incukudwane* (*Ledebouria ovatifolia*) (Nongoma, 1971). Once cut and trimmed shields were greased with cattle fat or brains (Nqutu, 1969; Nongoma, 1970).

To make thongs, an oxhide was cut into a long strip, which was looped several times over a branch of a tree or the cross-bar of a roughly H-shaped pole support. The strips were attached to a heavy stone and, by means of a long stick, were twisted up and then released. This process was repeated intermittently for about three weeks, by which time the thongs had been stretched and made supple (Aitchison 1917: 20).

Cutting and sewing

The skin-dresser himself cut away any irregularities in the edges of the hide. Further cutting and trimming was done by the specialist who made particular items (Bryant 1949: 404–405).

Sewing was done with twined sinew (*usinga*) or fig-tree bark fibre (*uzu*) (Mayr 1907: 634). A twine was made by hand-rolling the stranded fibres on the leg. By means of a long thorn (Mayr 1907: 634) or an awl (*usungulu*), small holes were made along the edges of the pieces of skin to be joined and the thread was passed through these (Isaacs [1836] 1970: 308). The completed garment was sometimes buried in manure to make it soft enough to straighten the seams (Bergville, 1969).

Practitioners

Most of the processes of skin-dressing were carried out by men (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 273; Champion [1835–9] 1967: 43) and, at the time when skins were commonly used for clothing and other domestic purposes, it is likely that most men knew and practised the techniques. There was, however, some specialization in the preparation of hides. Bryant (1949: 403) noted that the skills of a specialist (*impali*), were required at the cleaning stage to avoid damaging the hide with sharp-edged tools. The specialist generally worked on a hide supplied by the customer.

For royal and military use, hides were prepared by men at the command of the king (Webb & Wright 1976: 325) and it is likely that skin clothing for the regiments was manufactured by appointed craftsmen, as was the case for warriors' shields (Champion [1935–9] 1967: 107).

Traditionally women were involved in cutting and sewing articles of domestic clothing (Isaacs [1836] 1970: 308). Recently they have specialized in sewing married women's skirts (Bergville, 1969; Mahlabatini, 1970).

NATAL NGUNI: USES OF SKINS AND HIDES

CLOTHING AND ORNAMENT

APRONS

Terms: *ibele*—square of skin worn in front; *umnezezo*—short skin petticoat worn by women during menstruation or when at private work; *iqopho*—tasselled fringe of skin worn by Zulu girls on ceremonial occasions (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

A short frontal apron worn by girls was an indication of their unmarried status. The apron could be made from cut-off pieces of hide from larger garments, and consisted of a simple flap of soft skin, or of fringes of skin, vegetable fibre or beadwork. It varied regionally and with the prevailing fashion (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 274; Smith [1834–6] 1940: 121; Ludlow 1882: 77). Married women sometimes wore this apron as an ornament over their skin skirts (Krige 1950: 372).

Sources consulted were contradictory regarding the use of another skin garment, *umnenezo*, which Bryant (1949: 155) described as a ruffle and appropriate wear for when visiting outside the homestead, while Doke & Vilakazi (1964: 544) designated it a garment worn in privacy.

BABY-SLINGS

Terms: *umbodiya*—carrying skin for an infant; *imbeleko*—carrying skin, used by women for carrying their babies on their backs; *isidiya*—carrying skin for an infant (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

General

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries softened goat, calf or antelope skins were used by mothers and young girls to carry babies on their backs (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 302; Krauss [1838–40] 1973: 70; Delegorgue 1847: 326; Tyler 1891: 149, 150; Plant 1905: 13; Braadvedt 1927: 355). A baby-sling was often made from the skin of a goat sacrificed to celebrate the birth (Brindley 1985: 107), and sometimes from the breast-covering worn by the mother while pregnant (Bryant 1949: 611; Krige 1950: 62, 394). When a goat was sacrificed to improve the health of a sick baby, a carrying-sling was made from the skin of this animal (Webb & Wright 1982: 129). During the twentieth century, cloth became increasingly available and replaced skin baby-slings.

Southern Natal

Although goatskin baby-slings (*izimbeleko*), as described above, were said to have been largely replaced by cloth versions in the early twentieth century (Mayr 1907: 635), practices regarding goatskin baby-slings were still being recorded in the 1930s. They were made from the skins of goats sacrificed by the maternal and paternal grandparents at the birth of a child. Christian converts sold these skins and bought cloth for the same purpose (Kohler 1933: 98, 99). Should a child die, the *imbeleko* was not destroyed but kept to discourage despair (Mayr 1907: 643; Doke & Vilakazi 1964: 72).

BREAST-COVERINGS

Terms: *umbodiya*—skin covering for the breasts; *ingcayilisigcayi*—leather or other covering worn by women to cover the breasts and abdomen when first married or when pregnant; *isidiya*—skin covering for concealing the breasts (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

A supple covering of antelope skin, particularly rietbuck or duiker, was worn by newly married and pregnant women (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 274; Lebzelter 1934: 278; Bryant 1949: 610). It was customary for a young wife to cover her chest as a sign of respect for her husband's family (Samuelson 1929: 367). The garment was tied under the arms across the breast, reaching below the knees, and was worn with the hair outwards. The hair was removed from a broad central panel, which was decorated with metal beads or studs, as was the lower edge (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 274; Shooter 1857, pl. 3) (Figs 28A, B).

The choice of antelope skin was significant because of the association of the animal with swiftness and grace (Tyrrell 1968: 122; Brindley 1985: 101). However, a taboo on eating antelope meat was observed to avoid a difficult birth (Bryant 1949: 611). Because of restricted availability of game skins, goatskin has replaced their use.

A similar garment was described by Isaacs ([1836] 1970: 303, pl. facing p. 192) as worn by women of status at ceremonial occasions, but this is unconfirmed by other sources.



Fig. 28. A. Woman wearing a skin breast-covering; Natal, nineteenth century. (Mariannhill Mission.) B. Antelope-skin breast-covering; NM 1999, Zululand, 1912.

CLOAKS

Terms: *isibaceko*—cape, small covering for the shoulder; *isidwenga*—buckskin blanket; *umgaxo*—... hood of a skin blanket; *umaqapheqolo*—woman's kaross for every day; *ingubo*—cloak, covering for the body (of any kind); leathern robe, worn by men or women; *umnqwamba*—anything worn draped over the shoulders, e.g. witch-doctor's leather cloak; *isiphuku*—skin blanket, kaross; *isiqhama/o*—skin blanket, kaross; *usu*—... soft goatskin cloak, worn by women; *uvuhubuthu*—very large blanket, double blanket; *uwambalala/uwambazi*—very large blanket (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

General

Cloaks were worn by men, women and children as protection against the cold, and were used as blankets at night. Women's cloaks, often referred to by early writers as 'kaross', had many functions. They could be worn as skirts, or tied under the arms and around the waist to serve as baby-slings. The cloaks were made of supple cowhide, with the hair either retained or removed.

Cowhide cloaks were also used by men and, even after these had largely been replaced by cloth blankets, their use resumed on ritual occasions (Bleek [1855–6] 1965: 79).

As early as the 1850s, commercial cotton and woollen blankets were commonly replacing skin cloaks (Shooter 1857: 9), while Zulu kings had had access to trade cloth even earlier (Champion [1835–9] 1967: 32).

Goatskin cloaks (*izinsu*) had the hair removed only from a central band down the back and were worn by women (Bryant 1949: 169). Diviners wore cloaks made of goatskin (Webb & Wright 1976: 48) or black sheepskin (Schlosser 1972: 194).

During the winter, herdboys wore cloaks of sheepskin with the wool turned inwards (Aitchison 1917: 13).

Cloaks of wild-cat skin were worn by soldiers of rank (Arbousset & Daumas 1842: 146; Farber 1879: 110) and by the king's praise-singer (Gardiner 1836: 56, pl. facing p. 59). These were possibly a thick fringe of tails or twisted strips of pelt rather than a solid sewn fabric. Unlike the Southern Nguni custom, the use of leopard skin does not seem to have been exclusive to chiefs.

Commoners were buried wrapped in their skin cloaks, or later in blankets (Arbousset & Daumas 1842: 138; Bryant 1949: 700).

Drakensberg area

A Ngwane skin-worker practising in the Bergville area in 1969 made blankets or cloaks of rock-rabbit (*imbila*) skins sewn together. The pelts were supplied by himself or by the prospective owner.

Southern Natal

Cattle-hide cloaks, *iziphuku*, used in this area were well greased, and sometimes ochred red. Cloth substitutes were adopted soon after contact with traders (Mayr 1907: 634).

At the annual First Fruits ceremonies baboon skins were hung around the shoulders of the chiefs, forming a type of cloak (Lugg 1929: 372).

HEAD-DRESSES

Terms: *ibeqe*—strip of dry skin of blue monkey or genet, worn dangling on each side of the head before the ears, as warriors full-dress ornament at feasts, etc.; *umqhele*— . . . ornament (of beads or otter skin) worn encircling the head as a sign of rank, or by Zulu warriors (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

General

A special form of head-dress was part of the distinctive dress of each regiment. Feathers and cow tails were attached to an *umqhele*, a circlet of skin padded with bulrush heads or dry dung (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 284), which was worn fairly low on the brow and tied at the back of the head. Otter skin was worn by many regiments, and also by the king, since the otter was considered a royal animal (Krige 1950: 206; Webb & Wright 1979: 223; 1982: 318). Leopard skin was also used (Norbury 1880: 183; Samuelson 1929: 238).

The *ibeqe* head-dress consisted of flaps or squares of monkey or leopard skin attached to the headband and which hung down over the cheeks or down the back of the head (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 284; Angas 1849, pl. 20; AFR 72/4430, Nongoma, 1972).

In the nineteenth century these elaborate and distinctive items were worn by men in full military dress. Nowadays they are worn, especially by important political figures, at festive ceremonial occasions.

Southern Natal

In the 1930s, a fur cap was usually part of the courting finery worn by young Khuze and Bhaca men (Kohler 1933: 20). Young girls of marriageable age wore a padded soft skin headband, *umgokoloza*, on the forehead to keep their dressed hair out of their eyes (Kohler 1933: 100, 101). A soft piece of goatskin was worn over the head by a young Khuze or Bhaca bride to show respect to her husband's relatives (see Fig. 12), but by the 1930s this was often replaced by a black cloth (Kohler 1933: 91, 101).

Baboon and silver (vervet) monkey-skin caps were worn by chiefs at First Fruits ceremonies (Lugg 1929: 372, 374).

LOIN-COVERINGS

Terms: *ibele*—square of skin worn in front; *umbelenja*—square of skin worn hanging as frontal dress (in place of the *isinene* by men . . .); *amabeqe* (pl.)—tasselled rear dress of strips of blue monkey skin, worn by men; *ibeshu*—skin buttock covering worn by men, the rear part of the *umutsha* . . .; *umdada*—long rear skin worn by men; *idlaka*—man's loin covering when made of genet skin or other materials stripped or slit down but not twisted; *udlavini*—long front skin covering; *igqibo*—man's loin covering made of long pieces of twisted skin, hanging in tails; *uhayo*—loin girdle; *injobo*—a strip of wild cat's skin forming the loin covering of a . . . man; (pl. only)—bunches of cat's tails worn on either side; *umadimana*—bunch of twisted sheepskin worn with *ibeshu* at hips; *isinene*—frontal part of man's loin covering composed of tassels of soft twisted leather; *isiphenama*—coil of leather, with edges turned down, at the top of [a] . . . loin skin; *iqophela*—loin skin with soft tassels; *umqubula*—dancing apparel presented by the Zulu king to favourite warriors, consisting of three girdles of blue monkey tails; *isithinti*—loin covering of soft tassels; *isitobo*—loin girdle of cat's tails; *umutsha*—man or girl's loin covering of skin or fibre (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

General

Men's loin-dress varied in detail, as indicated by the many terms, but the basic form of front- and back-aprons is consistent in the descriptions in the literature for the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries (Fig. 29).

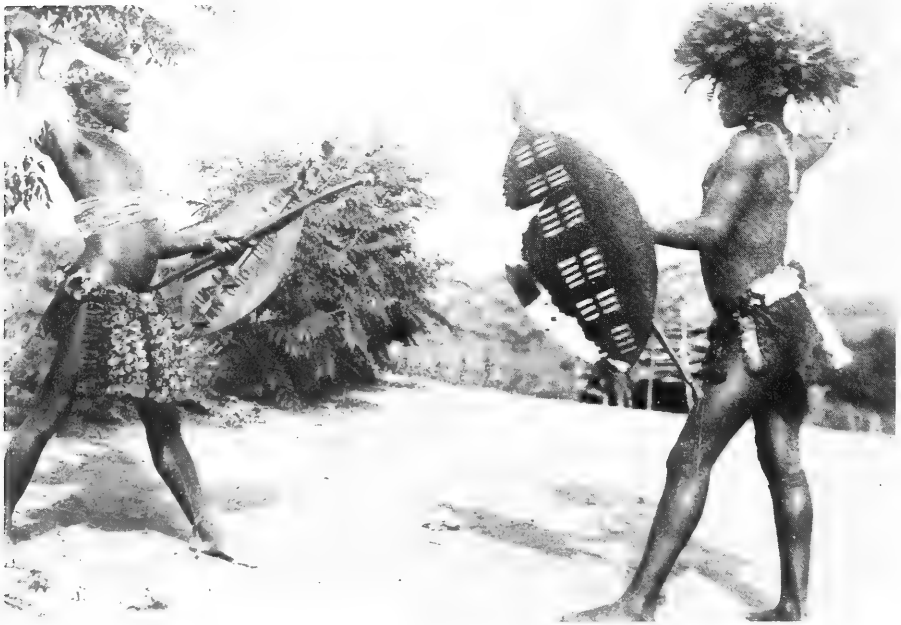


Fig. 29. Men in skin loin-coverings, showing the cattlehide *ibeshu* and twisted tails of the *isinene* and *izinjobo*; Natal, nineteenth century. (Mariannhill Mission.)

During the reign of Shaka (1816–28), the common loin-dress was of furry wild-cat and monkey tails reaching to about the knees, longer at the back than the front (Gardiner 1836: 101). The same style, sometimes using genet skin, continued in Mpande's period (1839–72) (Delegorgue 1847: 220–221). The use of a square of skin as a back-apron (*ibeshu*) was adopted in Cetshwayo's reign (1872–9) (Webb & Wright 1982: 166), although the fringe of 'tails' continued to be worn (Fig. 30). By the late nineteenth century, trousers were being worn by some men, but the front fringe (*isinene*) was retained and even worn over trousers (Joest 1885: 482). Skin loin-coverings were worn as everyday dress well into the twentieth century and are sometimes still worn when courting and as part of ceremonial dress (KwaZulu Cultural Centre, C 172, Msinga, 1985).

Dressed calfskin was most commonly used for the back-apron (*ibeshu*) (Fig. 31). The skin was cut in half cross-wise and the legs were trimmed. Overlapping short pieces of skin were sewn to the top straight side and folded over to form a firm waistband, *isiphenama* (Bryant 1949: 405). For the front (*isinene*) or

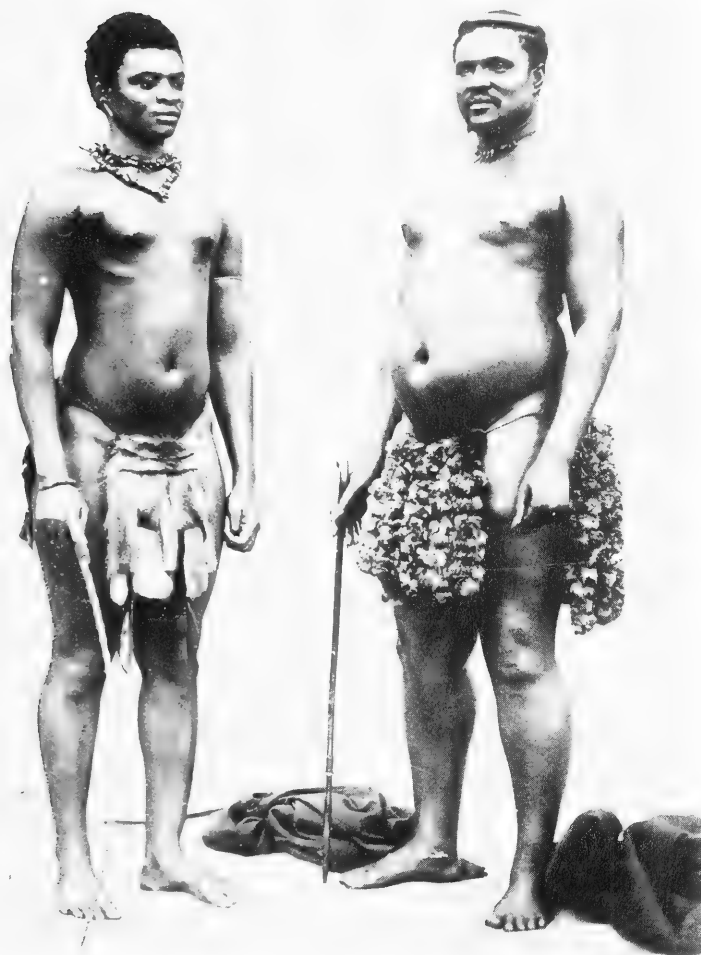


Fig. 30. Portrait of Cetshwayo and ?Dinizulu wearing skin loin-coverings; late nineteenth century.

side tassels (*izinjobo*) (Fig. 32A), hairy or soft furry skin was cut into long narrow strips. By various methods these were carefully cut and twisted to give the furry appearance of animal tails (Fig. 32B). One skin-dresser divided the hair on these into small clumps and tied them with thong. In some cases the tassels were only twisted and not sewn (Nongoma, 1971).

The dress of kings differed from that of commoners only in the richness and choice of the skins used. Shaka wore fringes of genet and blue monkey skins (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 74; Webb & Wright 1976: 97), and Dingane and Mpande wore tails of monkey skin (Champion [1835–9] 1967: 35; Krauss [1838–40] 1973: 69). Silver jackal skin for the front-apron and genet skin for the back were worn



Fig. 31. Zulu men and boys wearing calfskin back-aprons, c. 1930. (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)

by Cetshwayo (Webb & Wright 1979: 223). These were all valued skins, often collected as tribute from subject Tsonga (Webb & Wright 1976: 67, 238, 322).

During the reigns of Dingane, Mpande and Cetshwayo, leopard-skin loin-dresses were reserved for men of rank, councillors and warriors (Webb & Wright 1976: 46, 323). However, Shaka obliged old deposed chiefs to wear a monkey-skin loin-dress similar in shape to skirts worn by women (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 285). His *izimbongi* or praise-singers also wore cattle-hide loin-coverings shaped like women's skirts and reaching to the knees (Webb & Wright 1979: 177; 1982: 87). Diviners in the early twentieth century wore leopard and genet skin loin-coverings (Bryant 1909: 3).

Different military divisions were characterized by their distinctive dress as well as by their shields. In the first half of the nineteenth century, thick knee-length fringes of monkey and genet skins, cut into strips and twisted to resemble tails, were attached to a waistband and worn as front- and back-coverings (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 89; Gardiner 1836: 101). War uniforms were also worn for ceremonial dances. In the 1870s, men in Cetshwayo's regiments danced in loin-dresses of long-haired white goat and black sheepskin as well as genet (Webb & Wright 1979: 242). The *umqubulo* dress, which almost covered the entire body, was a special presentation by the king to favoured soldiers. From twenty to sixty strips of twisted monkey and genet skins were hung in three thick fringes around the neck, waist and buttocks (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 285; Webb & Wright 1976: 46, 52). An Angas (1849, pl. 15) drawing shows, in addition to the furry strips, a small

back-apron. However, one of Cetshwayo's followers in the 1850s stated that back-aprons were not worn for dancing (Webb & Wright 1979: 242).

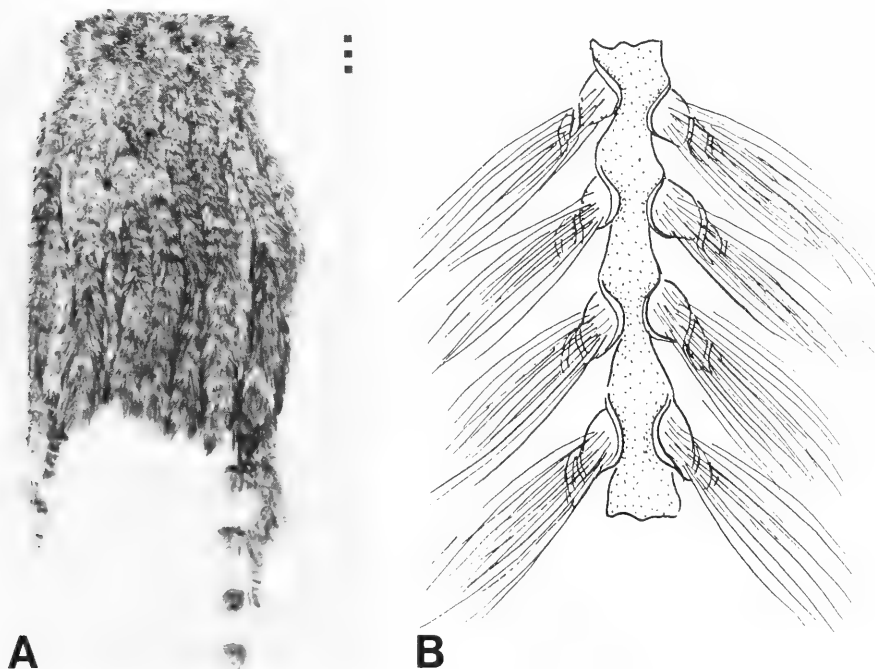


Fig. 32. A. Twisted strips of fur forming 'tails' of the *isinene*; SAM-11996, Hlazagazi, 1981. B. One method of cutting and twisting 'tails'; SAM-10060, Nongoma, 1971.

Southern Natal

Men in this area adopted the custom of covering the loins from the Zulu. Formerly only a fringe of plant fibre or a penis sheath was worn. Their later everyday loin-dresses were of goatskin and special ones, for dancing, were of mongoose and genet skins (Webb & Wright 1979: 131). At the First Fruits ceremonies, loin-coverings of silver monkey, civet cat and baboon skins were worn by chiefs (Lugg 1929: 372, 373).

PENIS-SHEATHS

Terms: *isichibi*—penis covering of soft skin worn in Zululand in Dingane's time; *inkhathanga*—skin prepuce cover for boys; *isiziba*—leather penis sheath (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

In the early nineteenth century, penis-sheaths made of soft oxhide or plaited plant material were generally worn by men under the *isinene* (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 293; Krauss [1834–40] 1969: 211). The use of penis-sheaths continued even after the practice of circumcision had been stopped by Shaka.

SANDALS

Terms: *isicathulo*—shoe, boot, sandal (originally applied to Native leather sandals, used by warriors when travelling long distances . . .); *inyathelo*—sandal (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

General

Sandals, worn to protect the feet of warriors on the march, were later forbidden by Shaka because he believed they slowed movement (Delegorgue 1847: 218). The stigma of wearing sandals continued during the Zulu war in the late nineteenth century (Webb & Wright 1982: 326).

Southern Natal

Sandals, consisting of a sole of oxhide tied to the foot with three skin straps, were sometimes worn when crossing rough or hot terrain (Mayr 1907: 638).

SKIRTS

Terms: *ingcuku*—large skin dress worn about the loins by women in the interior; *ingubo*— . . . covering for the body of any kind . . .; *isidwaba*—short skin petticoat, women's leather kilt worn from waist to knees; *isikhakha*—married woman's leather petticoat; *isikhindi*— . . . short skirt; *umqulu*— . . . rolled up part of a skin petticoat (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

General

The skin skirts worn in the first half of the nineteenth century were of two types and apparently differed according to the status of the wearer and to the occasion.



Fig. 33. Woman wearing knee-length skirt. (Shooter 1857.)

A short skirt (Fig. 33) tied at the waist and reaching the knee was the usual dress of women (Isaacs [1836] 1970: 303; Gardiner 1836: 100; Shooter 1857: 6; Webb & Wright 1976: 38).

Long skirts with two wide trains nearly a metre long reaching on to the ground (Fig. 34) were worn by women of rank for ceremonies and dances (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 274; Isaacs [1836] 1970: 303, pl. facing p. 192; Shooter 1857: 9). They were sometimes decorated at the waist with brass beads (Gardiner 1836: 63).



Fig. 34. Woman wearing long skirt with train. (Isaacs 1836.)

The *ingubo*, usually a cloak (see p. 356), could be worn as a skirt, tied at the waist with the excess hide rolled up. The length indicated the status of the wearer (Delegorgue 1847: 226).

In the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the use of the longer trained skirt was not recorded. Bryant (1949: 152) suggested that it became obsolete during Mpande's reign (1839–72). Knee-length skin skirts, sometimes flared by the addition of shaped panels, were still worn (Fig. 35). However the skirt, *isidwaba*, currently considered 'traditional', with many inserted skin panels giving a pleated effect (Fig. 36), was not documented in the literature of this period.



Fig. 35. Group of Natal Nguni women. On the left, a married woman wearing a flared skirt. (Mariannhill Mission.)

Half an ox- or cowhide usually provided the material for a skirt (Grout 1862: 105; Bryant 1949: 152), but goatskin was also used (Tugela Ferry, 1969). The hides of adult male animals produced the longest pile (Vaughan-Kirby 1918: 40). The tools, namely aloe leaves and the spiky *indhhlwandlwa*, that were used to clean skins had the effect of roughening the inner surface. In order to raise a pile on skins for skirts this scraping was exaggerated and, in addition, the skin could be beaten with a light switch. The hair was removed and the skin was softened and greased. The hide was then cut to shape. Leaving a deep waistband that was worn rolled over several times, the rest of the hide was cut to allow the insertion of wedge-shaped panels (*umthozo*). For simply flared skirts only a few panels were added (NM 702, Natal, 1906). To achieve the 'pleated' effect the entire width of the hide was cut into strips about 5 cm wide and a shaped panel was stitched to each of these (Figs 37, 38). To give the deep black colour, *imbecelo*, a mixture of charcoal or ashes with water or fat, was rubbed in (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 273; Tugela Ferry, 1969; Ingwavuma, 1970). The completed skirt might be scented by rubbing in a powder made from sweet-smelling plants, such as *umtomboti* (*Spirostachys africanus*), *umgxamu* (*Schotia brachypetala*) or *isigcenge* (*Heeria paniculosa*) (Bryant 1949: 405).



Fig. 36. Zulu woman wearing a skin skirt with 'pleated' effect; Mahlabatini, 1971.

The wearing of a skin skirt was associated with marriage. Sources vary as to whether the skirt was put on when a girl was betrothed (Plant 1905: 39; Samuelson, 1929: 358; Bryant 1949: 541), or when the bride appeared in public at the wedding ceremony (Braadvedt 1927: 557; Krige 1950: 135, 141, 148). It indicated married status and was considered a mark of respect, *hlonipa*, for her husband's family (Bryant 1949: 541).

It was customary during war for women to turn their skirts inside out so that the nap was on the outside (Webb & Wright 1982: 326; Krige 1950: 277). The skirt was also reversed at the death of a husband (Berglund 1976: 369–370). When a woman died a small piece of her skirt was cut and placed in her mouth (Braadvedt 1949: 186), while the skirt and other personal possessions were usually buried with her.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Cetshwayo's daughters were instructed by Dinizulu to wear European clothing (Webb & Wright 1982: 119). However, the use of the hide *isidwaba* has continued, encouraged by revivalist churches and nationalism.

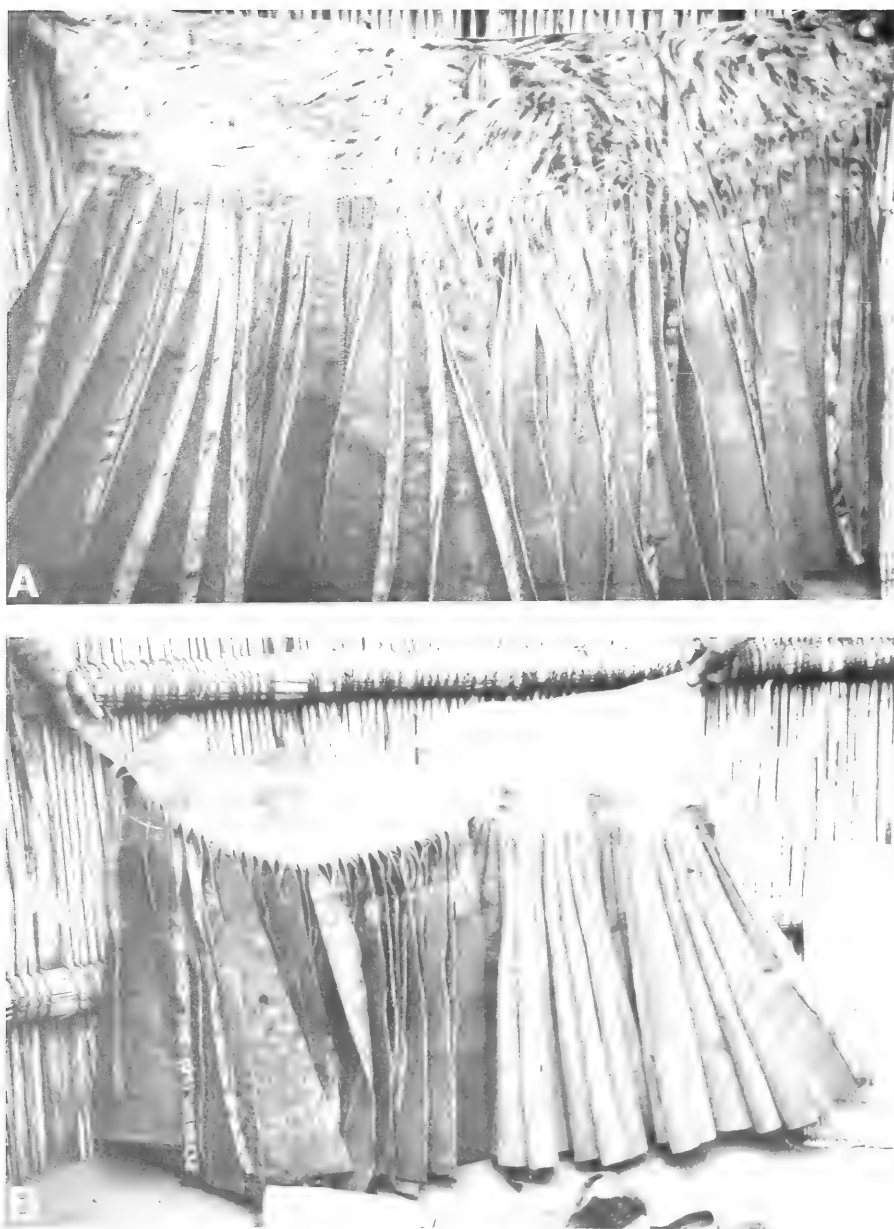


Fig. 37. A. Wrong side of *isidwaba*, with stitched panels. B. Unfinished right side, showing the 'pleated' effect.

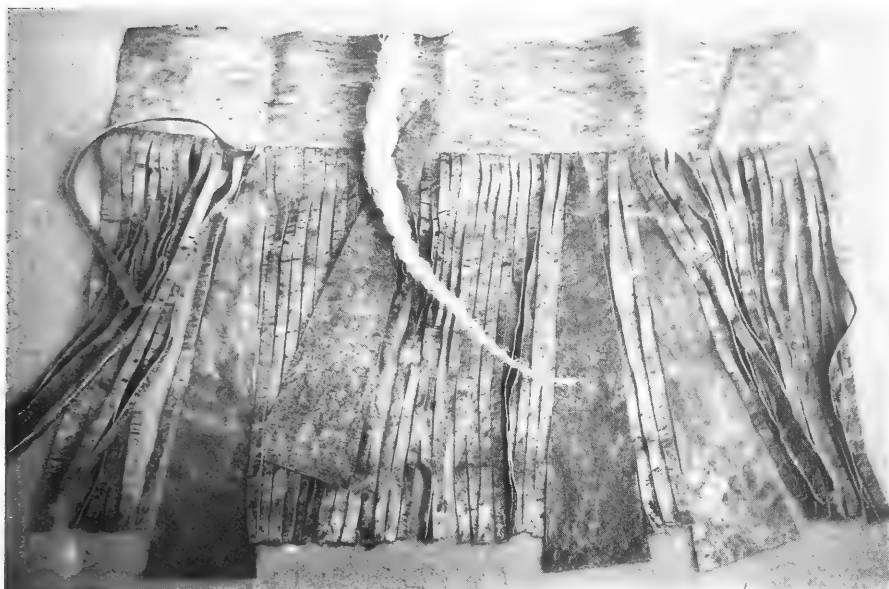


Fig. 38. Hide cut to make a skin skirt, *isidwaba*; Bergville, 1969. Showing deep waistband, narrow strips, wide wedge-shaped panels, and sinew thread for sewing.

Drakensberg area

In 1969 Ngwane skin-workers made skirts for Ngwane and Zizi customers on the same pattern as the Zulu *isidwaba*.

Southern Natal

Formerly skirts of ox- or cowhide, or goatskin, were long and reached to the ankles, according to a contemporary of Cetshwayo's from the Umlazi area (Webb & Wright 1982: 61). Later Bhaca skirts were about knee-length and consisted of separate broad front and rear panels of goatskin, about 70 cm long and 60 cm wide, with the hair removed except for narrow bands at either side. They were tied at the waist with thongs or cord (NM 996, Natal, 1909; Campbell MM 1823, Richmond, 1979; Bulwer, 1969).

By the early twentieth century, knee-length skirts (*isidwaba*) made of blackened ox- or goathide in the same style as those worn in Zululand, were being worn by married women (Mayr 1907: 636). The wearing of skirts was one of the *hlonipa* practices by which women showed respect to their husbands' kin (Kohler 1933: 94).

ORNAMENTS

In the Natal Nguni area skins from both game and domestic animals have been put to ornamental use. In most cases the particular skin used reflected the social position of the wearer. Table 1 summarizes the recorded skin ornaments. Diviner's costume was made up of skins of special symbolic significance.

TABLE 1
Skin ornaments recorded from the Natal Nguni area.

<i>Term/Description</i>	<i>Type of skin</i>	<i>Use</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Head ornaments			
<i>imvakazi</i>	not recorded	veil, covered with beadwork, worn at her wedding by the bride	Doke & Vilakazi 1964; Middlebrook 1897: 149.
<i>iphovela</i>	oxtail	worn upright, by warriors at feasts; distinguished some regiments	Doke & Vilakazi 1964; Samuelson 1929: 239.
<i>amanbatha</i>	not recorded	circlet with small bags of charms, worn by warrior who had killed in battle	Doke & Vilakazi 1964; Samuelson 1929: 323.
<i>ubunyathli</i>	buffalo, plaited	by young men, around head	Doke & Vilakazi 1964; Shooter 1836: 56; Krige 1950: 379.
face mask	leopard	by chiefs at First Fruits; and by praise-singers (Fig. 39)	Gardiner 1836; Lugg 1929: 374.
Neck and upper body ornaments			
<i>umklezo</i>	oxtail	by young men around neck; (pl.) as part of full military dress	Doke & Vilakazi 1964; Mayr 1907: 634.
<i>unungwamba</i>	goat	bandolier, worn by diviners in a pair criss-crossing the body	Berglund 1976: 154-155; Kohler 1941: 15.
<i>isiphandla</i>	samango monkey	men's bravery award, worn round neck	Samuelson 1929: 323.
strips of skin 15 cm by 1 cm	genet and monkey	two bands worn across chest; war dress	Fynn [1824-1861] 1950: 285; Champion [1835-1839] 1967: 81; Grout 1862: 106.
twisted to resemble tails, suspended on a cord			
<i>ungaxo</i>	not recorded	worn bandolier-style across chest	Doke & Vilakazi 1964.
<i>unabani</i>	calf, twisted cord	encircling body, part of full military dress	Doke & Vilakazi 1964.
<i>insonto</i>	calf, twisted cord	encircling body, worn by men (Figs 29, 40)	Doke & Vilakazi 1964.
chest ornament	leopard tail	by chiefs at First Fruits ceremonies	Lugg 1929: 374.
Waist ornaments			
<i>umbembeso</i>	oxhide	broad belts worn by Cetshwayo's umThulisazwe regiment	Doke & Vilakazi 1964; Webb & Wright 1982: 319.
Arm and leg ornaments			
<i>ingeqe</i>	oxtails, white	worn on wrist	Doke & Vilakazi 1964.
<i>ishoba</i>	'bushy tails'	worn on arms and legs; part of war dress; uniform of 'common soldier'	Doke & Vilakazi 1964; Fynn [1824-1861] 1950: 285; Mayr 1907: 635.
<i>isiphandla</i>	hide; goatskin	armlet	Doke & Vilakazi 1964.



Fig. 39. Zulu praise-singers' costumes. (Gardiner 1836.)



Fig. 40. Twisted calfskin waist ornament; SAM-10059, Nongoma, 1971.

CONTAINERS

BAGS

Terms: *imbaluko*—long pouch made of the skin of young calf, used for carrying a snuff-box; *imfutho/umfutho*—... small bag made of skin (for carrying a doctor's medicines, food, etc.); *umgodlo*—... containing bag . . .; *ingogo*—skin bag (used for carrying foodstuffs); *inhlanti/umhlanti*—small skin bag (as used by a doctor for carrying instruments and medicines); *ikhukhu*—... pouch, small bag; *isikhwama*—any small bag, purse, pocket, pouch; *incweba*—small skin bag containing medicines or charms and worn with others on a string round the neck; *ingqaba*—small skin bag of medicines and charms worn round the neck; *inqalaba*—small skin bag; *ingqalathi*—skin bag; *umxhaka*—skin bag; *iyika*—bag, sack (Doké & Vilakazi 1964); *inlanti*—skin sack (Bryant 1949: 271).

Diviners used bags (*imfutho*, *inhlanti*, *incweba*, *ingqaba*) to hold their medicines and charms (Krige 1950: 309). Sometimes the bag was carried by specially appointed boys, who also prepared the medicines (Schlosser 1972: 13).

The entire skin of an unborn or young calf was used to make a bag, *imbaluko*, in which a snuff-box was carried (Bryant 1909: 3). Old women wrapped their snuff in a roll made of the soft skin from the belly of an ox (Bryant 1949: 224).

Skin bags were also used to transport grain or other food.

Milk sacks about 30 cm long and 18 cm wide, with a small mouth, were made of cowhide, which was moistened with water and stuffed with earth and dung, and left to dry and harden. These were used for sour milk before the introduction of calabashes, said to have been made by Shaka (Lebzelter 1934: 273; Bryant 1949: 271).

QUIVERS

Terms: *isambo*—quiver for carrying assegais on the back . . .; *umgodla/o*—leather weapon holder; *umkhohlombe*—quiver, for carrying assegais on the back when mounted; *ingxiwa*—leather sheath for assegais and other weapons (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

Zululand

Sheaths for spears were recorded during the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879 (Norbury 1880: 279). A hide quiver collected at this period is a tapering sheath, about 50 cm in length and 8 cm at the widest part (MVB III.D. 478, Natal, 1881).

Southern Natal

A quiver for spears, said to have been amongst the arms of the Hlubi chief Langelibalele captured in 1873, is a narrow tapering bag of stiff hide, stitched with fine thong. The carrying strap is repaired with a section of manufactured leather belt (SAM-6647, Lesotho Border, 1947) (Fig. 41).

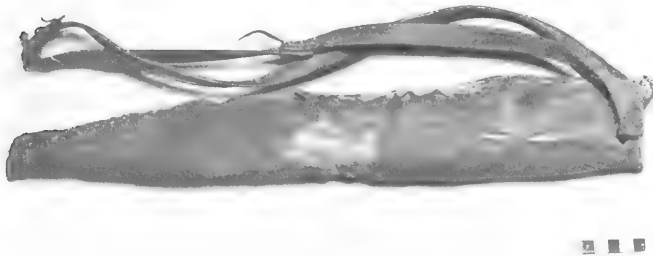


Fig. 41. Quiver for spears, allegedly belonging to the Hlubi chief, Langelibalele; SAM-6647, Lesotho Border, 1947.

SHIELDS

Terms: *isaphulo*— . . . small shield used by bridegroom's party at a wedding dance; *umbumbuluzo*—large war shield; *umdlela/o*—small shield, smaller than *isihlangu*; *igabelo*—one of the strips of skin interlaced lengthwise into the slits cut down the middle of a shield; *umgabelo*—cross-strips of hide, or pattern of cross-strips inserted down the middle of a shield; *igcokwe*—small shield used in dressing up for courting; *igqokwe*—shield, object of defence, protection; *ihawu*—general term for a shield . . . small shield, used at dances or when travelling; *isihlangu*—large war shield; *ihubelo*—large shield, used in hunting or fighting; *inguba*—shield; *ingungumela*—broad shield; *inkwaqa*—battle shield; *umsila*— . . . fur trimmed end of the stick of a shield; *itoto*—pattern of slits lengthwise in a shield (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

Shields were used for defence in war and the hunt, and as accessories on festive occasions. They were of a pointed oval shape and varied in size according to function. The large war shield, *isihlangu*, measured from the chin to the feet of the bearer and was twice the body width (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 285), that is, about 150 cm long by 90 cm wide (Holden [1866] 1963: 250; Delegorgue 1847: 220). After Cetshwayo's battle for succession in 1856, a slightly shorter shield (*umbumbuluzo*), which was easier to handle, came into more general use (Samuelson 1929: 237, 309).

During the reigns of the Zulu kings, war shields were made from hide provided by the king's herds of cattle (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 284; Gardiner 1836: 47; Bleek [1855–6] 1965: 74; Webb & Wright 1976: 61). Oxhide was preferred and fat animals provided the best hides (Krige 1950: 402). The side of the animal which received the stab wound was favoured (Webb & Wright 1979: 215). Shaka and Dingane used hides from the herds of Jobe, a chief near the Mzinyati (Buffalo) River (Webb & Wright 1976: 324, 1979: 60).

From the 1830s to 1970s, descriptions of the preparation of hides follow the same basic steps of pegging, drying and softening. From one oxhide a specialist cutter could make two shields (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 285; Gardiner 1836: 47; Champion [1835–9] 1967: 107). He also cut the two lines of horizontal slits through which strips (*imigabelo*) of cattle hide, usually of contrasting colour, were threaded. These reinforced the centre of the shield (Bryant 1949: 406) and were decorative. The cutting was judged by eye, although some shield-makers used a finished shield to mark the outline (Nongoma, 1970). The horizontal slits also secured short loops of twisted skin, which formed the handle, and broader skin strips folded to form triangular shapes, through which a stick was inserted (Fig. 42A, B). The stick, which was slightly longer than the shield, served to maintain the shape and rigidity of the shield. At the top it was decorated with a tuft of furry genet (*insimba*) skin or cow tail, or feathers (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 285; Champion [1835–9] 1967: 107; Holden [1866] 1963: 250; Ludlow 1882: 35; Hlabisa, 1970). A new shield was flattened with heavy stones or by sleeping on it (Nqutu, Bulwer, Bergville, 1969; Tugela Ferry, 1970).

The colour of the hide used for their shields was often the distinguishing mark of the different regiments (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 89; Delegorgue 1847: 400–401; Holden [1866] 1963: 250; Stuart 1913: 74; Samuelson 1929: 237). However, shields of more than one colour were used by certain regiments (Stuart 1913: 74; Webb & Wright 1982: 319) indicating that this was not the primary distinctive

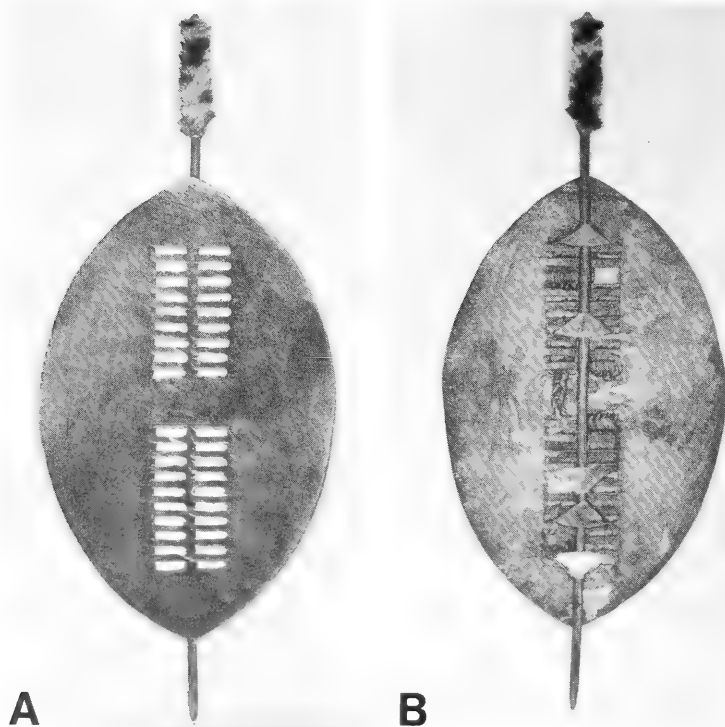


Fig. 42. A. Zulu shield, with decoration of contrasting skin; SAM-9978, Hlabisa, 1970. Length 800 mm. B. Back view showing twisted skin handle and stick in position.

feature of the uniform. The older men had shields of a light colour and the less experienced young men had darker shields (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 284). Cattle captured from the enemy were sorted according to colour and allotted to the various regiments to use as food and to provide shields of appropriate colouring (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 284). It was considered most offensive to carry the shield of a regiment to which one did not belong (Webb & Wright 1976: 303). The shields of the Zulu kings from Shaka to Cetshwayo were usually described as white with a black patch (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 75; Webb & Wright 1976: 46, 248, 326; 1979: 60, 223), but also sometimes as black with a white patch to the side (Webb & Wright 1976: 6; 1979: 60, 243).

War shields were stored by the king in special structures on stilts to protect them from vermin. They were periodically aired and shaken out (Champion [1835–9] 1967: 31–32; Webb & Wright 1976: 234). Before a campaign, regiments would come to the capital to collect their shields (Gardiner 1836: 47). On the march and while far from the enemy, the men carried their shields rolled up (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 123), and slept on them at night (Webb & Wright 1976: 124). In

battle Shaka noted specially brave men by the turning movements of their shields, which indicated that they were fighting on all sides (Webb & Wright 1976: 7). After a battle, kinsmen or friends would cover the bodies of the slain with their shields (Webb & Wright 1982: 318).

Kings were protected from the sun by a shield held by a bearer, who moved carefully to keep the king shaded (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 27; Webb & Wright 1976: 47; Angas 1849, pl. 11).

Besides the large war shields and the shields used when hunting, there were smaller shields that were men's personal property and were carried when travelling, visiting, or at dances (Smith [1831–2] 1955: 51; Holden [1866] 1963: 250). A very small shield, *igqoka*, about 30 cm by 20 cm, was carried by courting youths (Samuelson 1929: 309). At weddings small shields were beaten to accompany singing and dancing (Delegorgue 1847: 229–230; Holden [1866] 1963: 75, 234–235). They were still used on these occasions in the 1970s (Hlabisa, 1970).

Small shields were carried by male and female diviners (Shooter 1857: 174; Müller 1907, pls 6–8).

THONGS AND BINDINGS

Terms: *umchilo*—rope, cord or leather riem; *umdwishi*—long strip (as of cloth or hide); *umnsalela*—... belt, thong for tying; *uqhotho*—riem, dry thong; *umtilikisho*—smooth thong; *inkhulathi*—leather binding placed over the junction of the assegai head and shaft (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

As a means of securing objects, thongs had many uses. The inspanning of cattle, after the introduction of the plough in the nineteenth century, created a greater demand for thongs for use in yoking equipment. Terms for these are derived from Afrikaans, for example, *isitilobo*—strap for fixing keys to the yokes (from Afrikaans *strop*), and *itilensi*—riem joining yoke of oxen to pulling chain (from Afrikaans *trens*).

To fix a spearhead, the tang inserted in the shaft was very often secured by placing a section of wet, fresh calf- or oxtail over the joint. This was bound with string or glued to ensure a tight fit when the skin had dried and shrunk (Krige 1950: 210; Mahlabatini and Nongoma, 1970; Babanango, 1971).

MISCELLANEOUS

BELLOWS

Terms: *imfutho/isifutho/umfutho*—native blacksmith's bellows; *isivuthelo*—bellows (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

For smelting and the smithing of metal, the fire in the furnace was kept burning fiercely by means of pairs of skin bellows. Several pairs were used simultaneously for smelting (Gibson 1911: 6).

Well-softened oxhide, perhaps from an old kaross (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 272; Fleming 1856: 227), or soft goat or antelope skin (Holden [1866] 1963: 242; NASKO 4464, Piet Retief, 1914) was sewn into a bag of roughly rectangular shape with a small opening at one lower corner for a nozzle. On each side of the open



Fig. 43. Smith using a pair of goatskin bellows; Tugela Ferry, 1970.

top two sticks were sewn. The bellows worker pumped the two bags up and down alternately (Fig. 43) and, by manipulating the sticks, allowed air into the bag on the upstroke and closed it on the downstroke, forcing air through the nozzle to the furnace (Fynn [1824–61] 1950: 272; Delegorgue 1847: 32; Angas 1849, pl. 23).

BLANKETS

Softened cattle hides were used as blankets (Webb & Wright 1976: 323, 324), as were goatskins sewn together (Bryant 1949: 700).

DOORS

A hide might serve as a door, closing the entrance to a hut (Krauss [1839–40] 1969: 209).

MATS

Terms: *isibeqe/isibeqeza*—broad, flat object (as . . . small skin sleeping mat . . .) (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

Mats of cowskin, goatskin and other unspecified skins prepared simply by drying and cleaning, were used, as well as plant-fibre mats for sitting and sleeping on (Bleek [1855–6] 1965: 74; Little 1887: 443; Tugela Ferry, 1970).

Dingane is recorded as having used leopard and lion skins as mats (Webb & Wright 1976: 323).

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Terms: *isigubu*—... double-headed drum, of hollowed wood with stretched skin heads, played with two padded sticks; *ingungu*—friction drum made by straining a goatskin over a clay pot ... (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

The double-headed percussion drum (*isigubu*), made of wood with calf- or goatskin stretched across the ends and laced together with thongs, is thought to be derived from the European military drum as this type of drum is not a traditional Nguni instrument (Kirby 1934: 45). It is used to accompany dancing (Bergville, 1969) and has become associated with Zionist Church groups.

The earlier friction drum (*ingungu*) consisted of a clay, calabash or wooden vessel over the mouth of which goatskin, with the hair removed, was stretched and secured by a lacing of thongs. By running moistened fingers up and down a reed held vertically on the skin head a roaring sound was produced. It was played at girls' puberty ceremonies held formerly, but no longer observed in the 1920s (Kirby 1934: 26–28).

SHROUDS

After death, the body was bent into a sitting position and bound. Kings were wrapped in several layers of wet oxhide from specially killed beasts (Samuelson 1912: 17; 1929: 291; Webb & Wright 1976: 42). The heads of dead chiefs were wrapped in sheepskin, which—according to Lugg (1929: 369)—was associated with mourning.

Formerly the remains of commoners were not buried, but later they were buried wrapped in their skin cloaks (see p. 356).

SLINGS

Terms: *indwayimana*—leather sling used by Zulus to drive birds from the fields; *imbalimahu*—leather sling for stone throwing (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

No information other than the terms was found. Lindblom (1940: 29) suggested that the use of the sling was learnt from white farm children but the terms seem to contradict this.

WHIPS

Terms: *isampokwe*—sjambok, thick strip of hippopotamus hide used as a whip; *umcilikisho*—finely tapering sjambok; neatly made whip; *insilane*—whip; *isiswebu*—whip, wagon whip; *umvubu*—hippo hide sjambok (Doke & Vilakazi 1964).

Like the use of thongs for yoking cattle (see p. 373), the use of hide for whips probably accompanied the inspanning of cattle. Some of the terms are derived from Afrikaans. Hippopotamus and giraffe hide were especially valued for whip-making (Lugg 1971: 24).

WHISKS

Whisks were made of a section of cattle or antelope tail, with the tail hair fixed to a short stick. They were carried by diviners (Shooter 1857: 174; Müller 1907, pls 6–8).

SWAZI: SKIN-DRESSING

No historical account of skin-dressing was found in the literature and the following general description is from contemporary practices recorded in Mankaiana in 1971.

Drying

The fresh wet hide was pegged out to dry with small wooden pegs. If the narrow skin from the leg areas was required to be kept flat, small reeds of the proper length were positioned across to keep this skin open (Fig. 44).



Fig. 44. Skin from the leg area kept flat during drying by means of little reeds; Mankaiana, 1971.

Cleaning

Any remaining flesh was cleaned off with an adze.

Softening

Next the hide or skin was softened by rubbing with a rough stone, while moistening with water. Further softening was done by rubbing in putrified cattle brain, sometimes mixed with sour milk. This was left on the skin for two days and then cleaned off in cold water. The prepared hide was dried slowly, with occasional rubbing to keep it supple.

Application of fat and colouring

Some fat was supplied by the brain and milk applied for softening.

Women's skirts were blackened by rubbing in soot.

Preparation of unsoftened hides

To make the ubiquitously useful hide thongs, a long strip was cut from a hide, suspended from a branch and stretched and softened by weighting and twisting.

Practitioners

Skin-dressing was done by men. The basic methods of preparing, cutting and sewing skins were known by most men, but the expertise of those especially

skilful—for example, at scraping a hide or cutting shields—was sought by those wishing to have work done. This limited specialization might have been passed on within families (Kuper 1947: 140).

SWAZI: USES OF SKINS AND HIDES

CLOTHING AND ORNAMENT

APRONS

Young Swazi girls wore aprons of plant-fibre or cloth. Skin aprons were not mentioned in twentieth-century records but may have been used formerly (Marwick 1940: 86; Kuper 1947: 135).

BABY-SLINGS

Term: *imbeleko*—baby-sling (Engelbrecht 1930: 21).

Babies were carried tied to the back in a soft skin. The type of skin varied according to rank in Swazi society. Commoners used the soft skin of a goat slaughtered for the mother to celebrate the birth of the child (Marwick 1940: 147; Kuper 1947: 76). According to Kuper (1947: 76), babies of the royal clan were carried in the skin of a duiker (*umsumphe*), and the future king was carried in silver (vervet) monkey skin; this animal was associated with virility and long life.

BREAST-COVERINGS

Term: *sidziya*—breast-covering (Mankaiana, 1971).

This covering of goatskin had the hair removed from a central panel, and was worn hair-side out (Fig. 45). It was made for a young bride by her father and was worn as a sign of respect for her father-in-law. Initially it was tied under the arms but once she had a child, she could wear it tied over the right shoulder only (Marwick 1940: 101, 119; Kuper 1947: 136; Mankaiana, 1971).

Despite the general adoption of western dress, some examples of this garment were seen in use in the Mankaiana area in the 1970s.

CLOAKS

Terms: *sinokoti*—cloak of antelope skin or cattle hide; *siphuku*—cloak of goatskin (Marwick 1940: 85).

Cloaks of antelope, goat or cattle hide were worn in cold weather by men and women. By the 1930s these had often been replaced by cloth cloaks, or overcoats (Marwick 1940: 85). At a ceremonial occasion such as *Incwala* (a celebration of kingship and a First-Fruits rite), the wearing of skin clothing was resumed, and royalty were distinguished by their cloaks of leopard skin (Marwick 1940: 194; Kuper 1943–4: 248). A fine example of a chief's leopard-skin cloak is illustrated by Myburgh (1956: 147).

At the burial of the king, male mourners covered their shoulders with lion skins (Kuper 1947: 87).



Fig. 45. Swazi woman's breast-covering of goatskin; SAM-10134, Mankaiana, 1971.

LOIN-COVERINGS

Terms: *lidjoba*—loin-skin (Kuper 1947: 134); *libhebha*—loin-skin (Marwick 1940: 84; Myburgh 1949: 69).

Very young boys wore a small piece of skin attached to a girdle. From the age of about eight, two bigger and roughly triangular loin-skins, *lidjoba* or *libhebha*, attached at the front and at the back to a waist-girdle and tied on the right hip, were used (Marwick 1940: 84; Kuper 1947: 134). These were worn over a cloth wrap (Fig. 46). Formerly loin-skins were large, but since the adoption of printed cloth wraps, smaller skins have been worn over the cloth (Marwick 1940: 85).

The loin-skin was shaped during the skin-dressing process, while the hide was wet (Mankaiana, 1971). Goatskin was used by commoners, whereas leopard skin was reserved for chiefs and royalty (Myburgh 1956: 126). According to Coertzé (1930-1: 17) mature men wore, in addition to the *lidjoba* or *libhebha*, a soft skin drawn between the legs and fastened back and front to a waistband.



Fig. 46. Swazi man wearing skin loin-coverings over a cloth wrap; Mankaiana, 1971.

By the 1930s skin loin-coverings were rarely worn (Marwick 1940: 85; Myburgh 1956: 126) except at the annual *Incwala* ceremonies, when leopard-skin loin-coverings were worn by the king and by senior men of the royal village (Kuper 1943–4: 240; 1947, pl. 4b; Tyrrell 1968: 136–137) (Fig. 47).

SKIRTS

Term: *sidwaba*—skin skirt (Kuper 1947: 129).

A skirt of oxhide, *sidwaba*, was made by the father of a young woman about to be married, in recognition of her new status. After marriage the husband provided a new skirt every four or five years (Marwick 1940: 46, 101).

The hide for the skirt was dressed, and blackened by rubbing in the ashes of a plant called *isifunti*. The hair was removed, and long tapering panels were cut

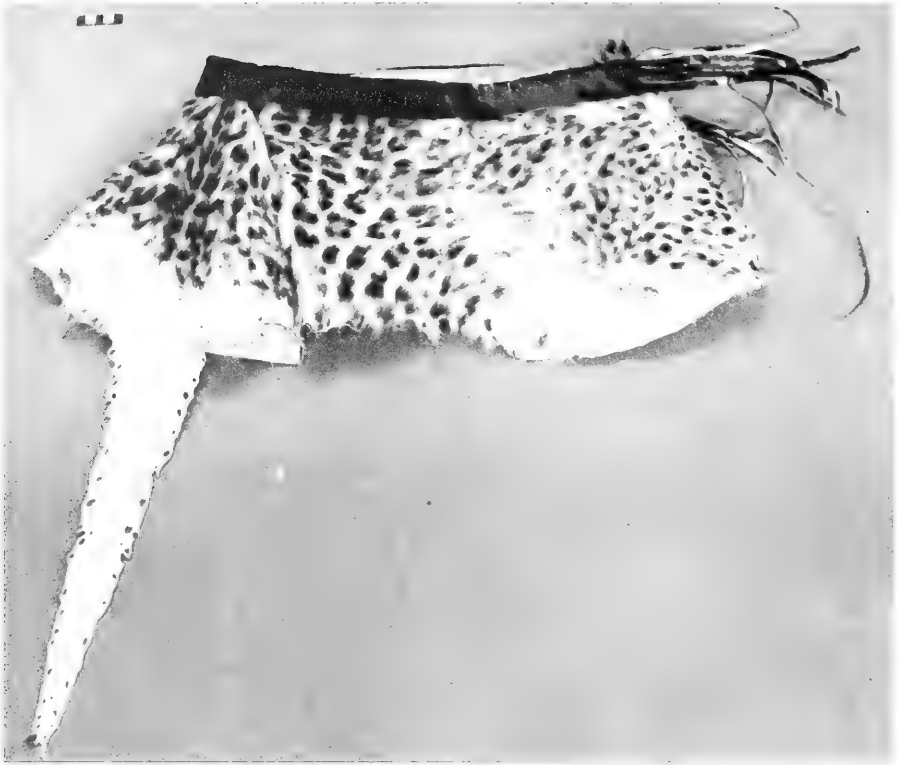


Fig. 47. Leopard-skin loin-covering worn by important Swazi men at the Incwala ceremonies; AFR 42/438, 1942.

that, when stitched together, fell in pleats from the waistband, like Zulu skirts (Mankaiana, 1971). In most areas women were responsible for the sewing but in the north-eastern parts of Swaziland it was done by men, indicating Tsonga influence (Kuper 1947: 140). Shavings of scented wood, *lubandze*, were sometimes rubbed into the hide (Myburgh 1956: 125). Hides for the skirts of the king's mother and wives were prepared with fat from cattle belonging to a sacred herd with magical powers (Kuper 1973: 325).

The *sidwaba* was worn by any woman who had a child, even if unmarried. The weight of the skirt symbolized the new responsibilities of marriage and motherhood (Kuper 1973: 352). A widow wore the skirt reversed (Kuper 1947: 183; Tyrrell 1968: 142, 145).

The *sidwaba* was commonly worn in Swaziland in the 1940s, after the other women's skin garments—the breast-covering and cloak—had fallen into disuse (Marwick 1940: 85). Although rare among Swazi living in the Transvaal in the 1950s (Myburgh 1956: 125), skin skirts were still being worn in Swaziland in the 1970s.

ORNAMENTS

Head ornaments

At the *Incwala* the king wore a lion-skin headband (*lidlabe*) (Kuper 1947: 217–218; 1973: 354), and the royal women wore baboon-skin head-dresses (Marwick 1940: 194).

Neck and chest ornaments

At the annual *Incwala* ceremonies, Swazi warriors wore ornaments of thin strips of furry skin around the neck and bandolier fashion from the right shoulder across the chest (Kuper 1947, pl. 3a; Tyrrell 1968: 136), with a number of fluffed-out cattle tails attached to cords on the shoulders, arms and legs (Kuper 1947, pl. 4b; AFR 42/447).

Waist ornaments

Young men wore waist ornaments made of strips of oxhide, twisted so that the hair stood out (Coertzé 1930–1: 16).

SHIELDS

Terms: *sihlangu*—oxhide war shield; *lihau*—dancing shield (Kuper 1947: 124).

The Swazi war shield of cattle hide was of a rounded oval shape, and reached approximately from the shoulder to the thigh. Although it differed from the Zulu shield in shape, it had similar decoration and was held in the same way (Duggan-Cronin 1941, pls. 131, 132; Kuper 1947: 124) (Fig. 48). Black shields, similar to the war shields, were used at the *Incwala* ceremonies. These were cut from the hides of the king's cattle, and stored with other ritual paraphernalia at the royal capital (Kuper 1943–4: 250).

Small shields were carried by men when dancing, courting or visiting (Kuper 1947: 124). They were beaten rhythmically to accompany singing and dancing at ceremonies (Kirby 1934: 23). Children used small shields as toys (Merensky & Grutzner 1861: 137).

THONGS

These were cut from cattle hide (see p. 376), and probably came into much greater use when the yoking of oxen for ploughing was introduced.

Black oxhide was cut into thongs and twined around a calabash used ritually in the *Incwala* ceremonies (Cook 1930: 206; Kuper 1943–4: 232).

MISCELLANEOUS

MATS

During the seclusion period of the *Incwala* ceremonies, the king sat alone on a lion skin (Kuper 1947: 219). The symbolic association of the lion and the king is expressed in his praise-name *Ingwenyama*, meaning 'lion'.



Fig. 48. Swazi men with war shields. (Duggan-Cronin collection, McGregor Museum.)

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Terms: *luveve*—whistle; *itambula*—drum (Kirby 1934: 25, 112); *mandzawe*—drum (Marwick 1940: 82).

A piece of smooth goatskin, held over the mouth of a clay pot by the drummer or an assistant, formed the head of a drum that was used at ceremonies or divinations; this type of drum was beaten with a reed. *Itambula* (possibly derived from the Portuguese word *tambula*) and *mandzawe* both refer to this type of drum (Kirby 1934: 25, 26, pl. 8; Marwick 1940: 82).

A wet oxtail was drawn over a horn whistle (*luveve*), to prevent air leakage. This whistle was played only for specific purposes, such as calling a hunt, in divination, and in battle (Kirby 1934: 111, pl. 38B).

SHROUDS

A corpse was tied up in a sitting position, and wrapped in his blankets if a man, or, if a woman, in her skin skirt and breast-covering. In the case of royalty and headmen, the body was wrapped in wet oxhide (Marwick 1940: 222; Kuper 1947: 178–179).

WHISKS

Diviners carried medicated whisks made of the tail of a kudu or wildebeest, which are powerful and sensitive animals (Kuper 1947: 167).

SOUTHERN TRANSVAAL NDEBELE: SKIN-DRESSING

The following outline of skin-dressing processes is based on descriptions of the preparation of goatskin obtained in the Ndzundza and Manala areas of Groblersdal (1972), Nebo (1972), and Dennilton (1983). The published sources consulted gave no information on skin-dressing techniques.

Drying

The flayed skin was soaked overnight, then pegged out to dry with the flesh side up.

Cleaning

The flesh side was cleaned by scraping with an aloe leaf or an *ikhuhlo*, a scratching tool made of nails (Fig. 49).

Softening

To soften the skin, putrified brains of cattle or goat were rubbed in, and sometimes covered with a layer of dung. The skin was also softened by rubbing it with stones or in the hands (*-tshuga*), with two men working on one skin. If so required, the hair was scraped off by means of an adze (*ipotho*) and any remaining stubble was smoothed with a rough stone. The thickness of the skin was reduced by scraping with an adze.

Application of fat and colouring

After cutting, some garments—notably back-aprons—were greased with cattle fat to make them more supple. This step darkened the appearance of the dressed skin.

Unsoftened hides

Ox- or cowhide used for shields was pegged out to dry for a few days, with occasional moistening. No particular steps for softening were followed but, if the



Fig. 49. Skin-worker's tools; Dennilton, 1983.

newly cut shield was buckled, it was buried and weighted under manure in the cattle enclosure. This would have both cleaned and somewhat softened the hide (see pp. 352–353) but over a short period would not have removed the hair. Five small oval shields could be cut from one cattle hide (Nebo, 1972).

Thongs were made by cutting a cattle hide into a long strip and suspending this, weighted, from the branch of a tree, and repeatedly twisting and releasing it (Nebo, 1972).

Cutting and sewing

For cutting, the dressed skin was again pegged out (Nebo, 1972) and the pattern was marked (Dennilton, 1983).

For stitching dressed skins, twined thread was made by rubbing together (*-photela*) lengths of sinew taken from the tendons of slaughtered animals. Later, sisal fibre has sometimes replaced sinew. Small holes were made with an awl along the edges of the prepared and cut skins and the thread was worked through these (Fig. 50A–B) (Dennilton, 1983).

Practitioners

Among the Ndzundza, the preparation of hides and skins and the cutting of garments was done by men of the family. However, increasing involvement as migrant labourers has meant that these tasks have been performed mainly by

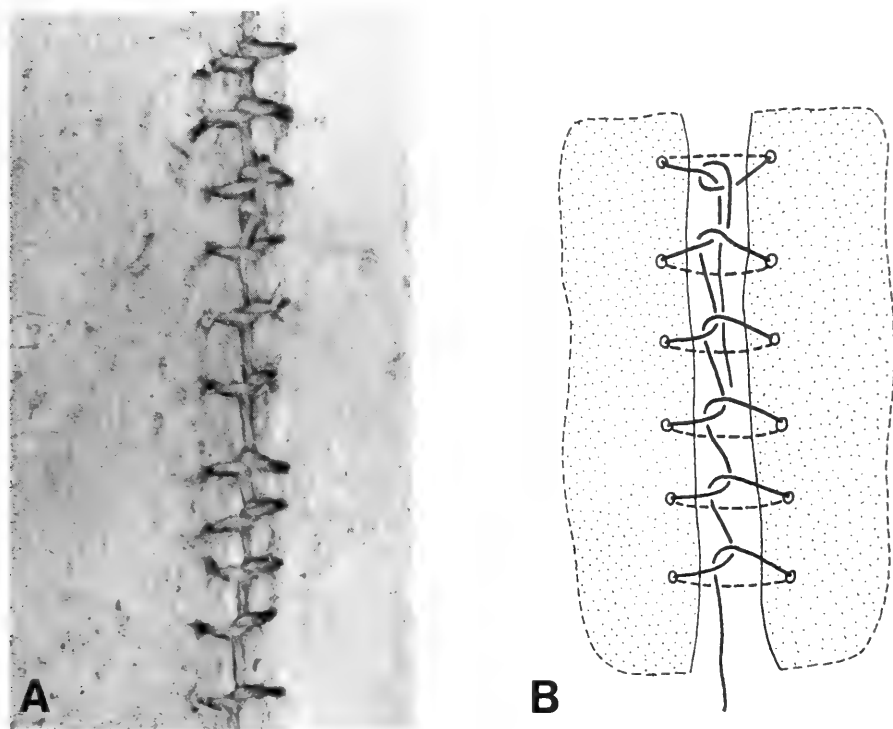


Fig. 50. A. Sewing stitch used to make a flat-seam. B. Sketch showing this method of stitching. SAM-10142, Groblersdal, 1972.

elderly men. The co-operation of helpers was required for softening skins by hand. However, in 1972 in the Groblersdal area, only a few old men were still practising this craft, and in 1983 cut dressed hides were being sold at a trading-store in the Dennilton district. This indicates a continuing demand for skin clothing, which evidently was being supplied by local specialists. Canvas aprons cut on the same pattern as the skin prototype were also on sale and had replaced the use of skin to some extent.

The expression of group identity, as reflected in a distinctive style of clothing, seems to have maintained a skin-working tradition and stimulated a degree of specialization among the Southern Transvaal Ndebele.

SOUTHERN TRANSVAAL NDEBELE: USES OF SKIN AND HIDES

CLOTHING AND ORNAMENT

APRONS

Terms: *igabe*—fringed apron worn by very young girls; *isiphephetu*—stiff front-apron worn by girls; *itshogolo*—married woman's apron; *amaphotho*—married woman's fringed apron; *isithimba*—woman's back-apron (Groblersdal, 1972; Dennilton, 1983).

Front- and back-aprons in various shapes were worn by Ndebele girls and women at particular stages of life. Very young girls wore an *igabe*, a frontal apron consisting of a fringe of skin or plant-fibre attached to a waistband (Weiss 1963: 44). After initiation older girls wore an *isiphephethu*, a front-apron about 30 cm square made of cattle hide, goatskin or canvas with a stiff backing, and an *isithimba*, a well-greased soft goatskin back-apron with an oval point that reached to the calves (Fig. 51). The top edge was padded with grass or cloth to form a firm waistband, and skin thongs tied the apron around the waist. This was made for an initiated girl by her father. It was also worn by married women, who when widowed cut off the point to leave a blunt edge as a sign of mourning (Weiss 1963: 45, 65).



Fig. 51. Southern Transvaal Ndebele woman's back-apron, *isithimba*, with padded waistband and beadwork decoration; SAM-12457, Dennilton, 1983.

Married women also wore distinctive front-aprons, larger and more elaborate than the *isiphephethu*. A bride wore the *itshogolo*, a roughly rectangular goatskin apron, which reached below the knees and had five lappets cut at the lower edge (Fig. 52A–B). These were measured by the skin-worker: each lappet was the width of his hand, the central one (*isonto elikhulu*) was a handspan long, the next (*isonto elilandelayo*) the span between thumb and forefinger, the shortest (*isonto elincinane*) was the length of a forefinger. The tail (*umsila*), of the goat was attached centrally just beneath the thick, rolled waistband (Tyrrell 1968: 86, 87).

The dressed and cut goatskin was given to the bride by her husband's family (Dennilton, 1983). At the wedding the apron was apparently worn undecorated (Weiss 1963: 48). However, as the status of a married woman grew this was

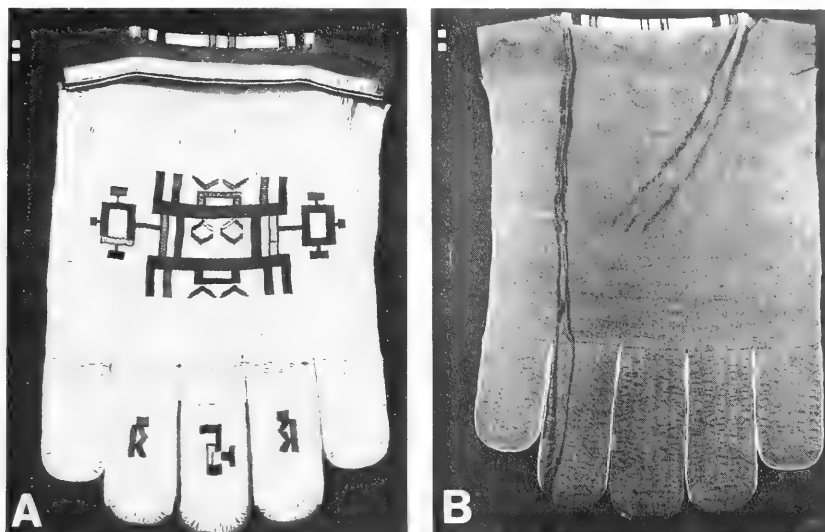


Fig. 52. Front of Ndzundza woman's goatskin apron, *itshogolo*; SAM-10144, Groblersdal, 1972. A. Front view. B. Reverse view.

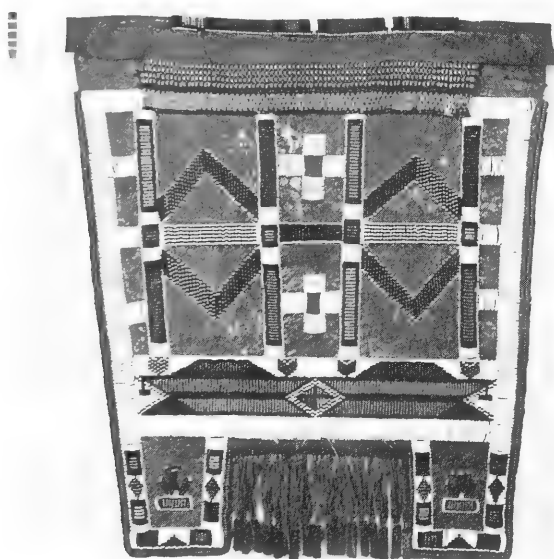


Fig. 53. Decorated *amapotho*; SAM-11456, Valschfontein, 1978.

reflected in the beaded decoration of the *itshogolo*, which was worn at special ceremonial occasions (Immelman 1986 pers. comm.).

The more commonly worn married woman's apron, *amaphotho*, was also of goatskin and similar in shape to the *itshogolo*, except that a beaded fringe replaced the central lappets. It was sometimes worn over the *itshogolo*, and was used at less important ceremonies (Immelman 1986 pers. comm.) (Fig. 53).

BABY-SLINGS

Term: *imbeleko*—baby-sling (Weiss 1963: 60).

A baby-sling was made by the father from the dressed skin of a goat sacrificed to celebrate the birth of the child. The skin was used with the hair-side towards the body. The top was folded over slightly and the legs were used as ties (Weiss 1963: 60; Dennilton, 1983).

CLOAKS

Term: *naga*—cloak (Weiss 1963: 49).

Cloaks could be worn by all adults but tended to be a sign of the special status of brides, old women, and young male initiates (Weiss 1963: 61). They were made predominantly of sheepskin, with goat- and antelope-skin insertions. Chiefs' cloaks were of leopard, lion, rhebuck or reedbuck skins (Weiss 1963: 63).

The shape was roughly semicircular, made up of large shaped panels, with numerous smaller panels along the curved bottom edge (Fig. 54A–B). The central bottom panel was in some cases of duiker (*impunzi*) skin, blackened with charcoal and decorated with incised designs (SAM-10142, Groblersdal, 1972; NASKO 67/113, Groblersdal, 1967). The top edge was folded over like a collar and had flaps, called ears (*iindlebe*), hanging down behind the neck. The panels of the cloak were sewn together with sinew thread, and the garment was worn with the hair-side towards the body (Weiss 1963: 49; Groblersdal, 1972). Beadwork decoration was often applied, especially white beads for brides (Tyrrell 1968: 86; DC 137, Potgietersrus, 1946).

Skin cloaks became less widely used as commercial blankets became more readily available.

HEAD-DRESSES

Term: *umqhele*—head-band (Nebo, 1972).

For ceremonies, senior men wore an *umqhele*, a Zulu-style padded otter-skin headband, with wild-cat skin ear-flaps (Nebo, 1972). Male initiates wore caps made of red rock-rabbit (*rooihaas*) skin (Weiss 1963: 62).

LOIN-COVERINGS

Terms: *ibeshu*—back part of loin-covering; *amajobo*—fringes forming frontal loin-covering (Weiss 1963: 61); *matsetsha*—front and back loin-covering (Weiss 1963: 60); *isivunule*—pull-through loin-skin (Weiss 1963: 61; Dennilton, 1983).

Young Ndzundza boys wore a small skin fringe in front, joined by thong ties to a small square of goat or cattle hide at the back. By the 1960s these were rarely

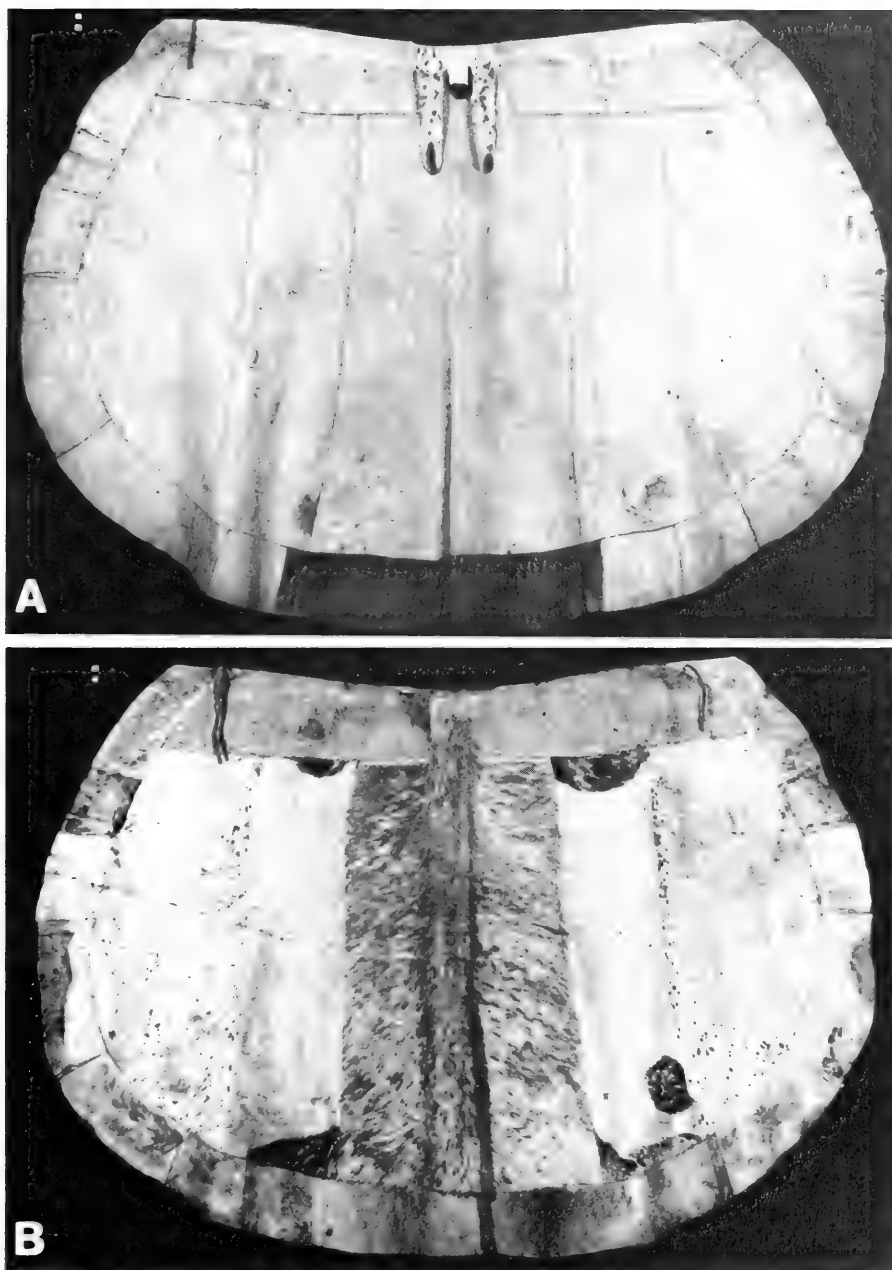


Fig. 54. Ndzundza skin cloak, *inaga*, showing flaps, *iindlebe*, folded collar, panels, and blackened lower edge; SAM-10142, Groblersdal, 1972. A. Front view. B. Reverse view.

worn (Weiss 1963: 51, 69). After their initiation, youths wore an *isivunule*, a larger supple covering of antelope or goatskin, which was drawn between the legs and tied at the waist (Weiss 1963: 61; NASKO 67/114, Groblersdal, 1967; Dennilton, 1983).

ORNAMENTS

Chest ornaments

Term: *iporeana*—special men's ornament of wild-cat skin (Weiss 1963: 52; Dennilton, 1983).

The furry skins of wild-cat (*imphaka*, *tsipu*), mongoose (*imvunze*, *ikoni*) or leopard (*ingwe*), were used alone or in combination to make the *iporeana*, which was worn on the chest and held around the neck by a thin thong (Fig. 55). Only a chief could wear one of leopard skin. This ornament signified the status of elder married men and was worn at the initiation of a son, weddings, and other special ceremonial occasions (Weiss 1963: 62; Dennilton, 1983).



Fig. 55. Senior men's chest decoration, *iporeana*; Dennilton, 1983.

No other skin ornaments were recorded. However Southern Transvaal Ndebele women wore much ornamental beadwork, some of which used skin as a foundation, or thongs as ties.

CONTAINERS

BAGS

Term: *inhlanti*—bag (Nebo, 1972).

A bag for a diviner's bones was the only recorded use of reptile skin. The entire skin of a monitor lizard (*uxam*) was carefully removed by cutting along the inside of the limbs, and then softened. One skin could make two tubular bags (Nebo, 1972).

SHIELDS

Term: *sihlangu*—shield (Nebo, 1972).

Small oval shields were made of ox- or cowhide, chosen for particular colouring (Nebo, 1972), and were supported by a stick decorated at the tip with furry skin. The shields were carried by male initiates (Tyrrell 1968: 80).

MISCELLANEOUS

WHISKS

Term: *umsila*—whisk (Weiss 1963: 74).

A whisk made of black or white cow tail, was carried by diviners (Weiss 1963: 54, 55).

NORTHERN TRANSVAAL NDEBELE: SKIN-DRESSING

The Northern Transvaal Ndebele have been strongly influenced by the Sotho groups amongst whom they live. Although no record of skin-dressing was obtained in the literature or the field, it is probable that the basic processes of drying, cleaning, softening and oiling were followed, and that according to both Nguni and Sotho practice, the dressing of hides and skins was done by men.

NORTHERN TRANSVAAL NDEBELE: USES OF SKINS AND HIDES

CLOTHING AND ORNAMENT

Although the garments described below were made and used by the Northern Transvaal Ndebele, both have Sotho origins.

APRONS

The only specimen noted shows strong Sotho influence in its triangular shape with forked 'swallow-tail' lower edge (DC 429, Potgietersrust, 1933). Made of oxhide, it is 49 cm long, and is folded over at the waist (Fig. 56).

LOIN-COVERINGS

Term: *setsiba*—loin-skin (Pietersburg, 1967).

Pull-through loin-coverings made of well-softened goatskin were worn by young male initiates (NASKO 61/190, Grasvlei, 1961; Pietersburg, 1967) (Fig. 57). This form of loin-skin was not generally worn by Nguni men, but was adopted from the Sotho in this area.



Fig. 56. Apron, showing marked Sotho influence, worn by Northern Transvaal Ndebele women; DC 429, Potgietersrus, 1933.

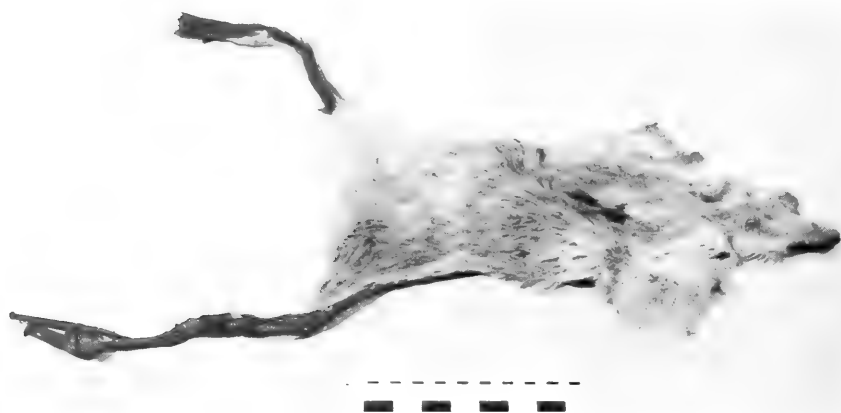


Fig. 57. Northern Transvaal Ndebele man's loin-covering; NASKO 61/190, Grasvlei, 1961.

NDEBELE IN ZIMBABWE: SKIN-DRESSING

The following account of the method of preparation is based mainly on descriptions of contemporary practice at Essexvale, Tjolotjo, and Bulawayo in 1973.

Drying

Cattle hide and goatskin were soaked in water and then pegged out to dry. Antelope skin was pegged and dried without soaking.

Cleaning

The flesh-side of the dried skin or hide was scraped clean with an aloe leaf (Smith [1834–6] 1975: 280), an adze (*isancelo*), or rough stone. These tools also raised a slight nap.

Softening

Softening was done by rubbing with a rough stone, or by applying fatty substances such as milk—probably soured (Smith [1834–6] 1975: 280), or putrified cattle brain, or oil obtained from crushed nuts of the *umtunduluka* tree (*Ximenia caffra*) mixed with cream. A moist application of beer dregs was also sometimes used (Hughes & Van Velsen 1955: 61). Skins were finally softened by rubbing in the hands.

Application of colouring

Cloaks were blackened on the outside, but the substance used was not recorded (Smith [1834–6] 1975: 277).

Dressing of fur and hair

Rock-rabbit skins were treated as described above, except that no fats were applied. Leopard skins were not pegged out. Excess water was wrung out by twisting the skin with the aid of a stick. It was scraped clean with an adze, and *umtunduluka* (*Ximenia caffra*) oil and cream were rubbed in.

Preparation of unsoftened hides

Oxhide for shields was cleaned by soaking overnight in running river water. Softening was achieved by burying the hide in manure in the cattle byre, and beating it until sufficiently flexible (Wilkerson [1896] 1943: 14).

To make thongs, an oxhide was cut into a continuous strip the width of four fingers. This was weighted and stretched by hanging from a tree (see p. 353). Oil from castor-oil seeds (*Ricinus communis*) or putrified ox brain, which were applied to the hide while stretched, improved the tensile strength of the thongs (Reed 1972: 68). When the process was complete, the thongs were the width of three fingers.

Practitioners

Men were generally responsible for skin-dressing, and made most of the household articles required. In the 1830s, specialists dressed skins for customers, who provided the skin and paid for the labour (Smith [1834–6] 1975: 280). Neighbours might co-operate in softening a hide. Women helped with cutting prepared skins. There was some specialization in the sewing together of skin blankets and in shield-making (Hughes & Van Velsen 1955: 60).

NDEBELE IN ZIMBABWE: USES OF SKINS AND HIDES

CLOTHING AND ORNAMENT

APRONS

In the late nineteenth century small front- and back-aprons of antelope skin or goatskin were worn by unmarried girls (Selous 1890: 28).

CLOAKS

Term: *ixaba*—blanket (Essexvale, 1973).

Men's cloaks were made of an entire softened hide (Smith [1834–6] 1975: 201) (Fig. 58).

The only museum specimen of a skin cloak recorded is a woman's cloak made up of numerous narrow panels stitched together and ending in curved lappets (DC 2071, Shangani Reserve). It was worn with the hairy-side towards the body.

The dead were buried bound and wrapped in their cloaks (Smith [1834–6] 1975: 279).

HEAD-DRESSES

Term: *ituku*—cap (Tjolutjo, 1973).

An otter-skin headband was worn by distinguished warriors (Baines 1877: 34; Selous 1890: 53).

Diviners wore fur caps (Anderson 1888: 366).

Jackal skin was used for furry caps worn by men in Tjolutjo in 1973.

Women in mourning wore a band of oxbide on the forehead (Anonymous 1891: 54).

LOIN-COVERINGS

Terms: *ibeju*—skin apron and breech covering; *umtika*—kilt (Summers & Pagden 1970: 24); *ilitinsi*—skin worn wrapped around like a skirt (Hughes & Summers 1955: 787).

Young boys and men wore skin fringes as front- and back-coverings in the mid-nineteenth century (Smith [1834–6] 1940: 75, pl. 19) (Fig. 58). The fringes were made up of animal tails, or strips of skin cut and twisted to resemble these, attached to a narrow waistband (Arbousset & Daumas 1842: 144). At a later period these 'tail' fringes, *umtika*, were adopted by youths when joining their regiments, and were worn only for war or ceremonial dress (Hughes & Summers 1955: 787). Wild-cat tails were commonly used, vervet monkey tails more rarely, while the tails of the exotic samango monkey were reserved for the king

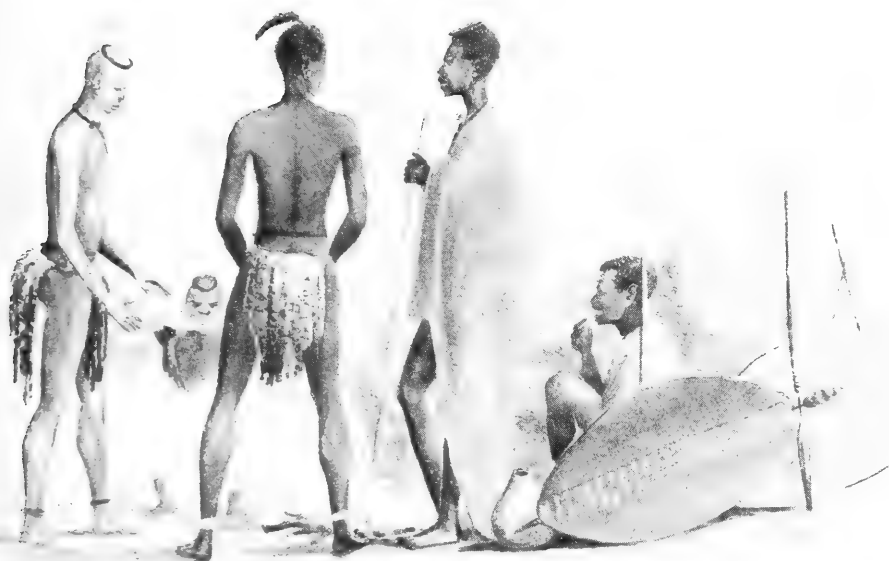


Fig. 58. Ndebele soldiers. Note cloak, fringed loin-coverings, and shields; by Bell (1835). (Africana Museum.)

(Summers & Pagden 1970: 24). The *ibeju*, consisting of square front and back skin aprons, was worn under the *umtika*, and was the everyday dress of men (Summers & Pagden 1970: 24). A skin wraparound loin-covering, *ilitinsi*, was also sometimes worn (Hughes & Summers 1955: 787).

A garment described by Harris as the 'full costume . . . *Umcooloolooloo* . . . ' (Hughes & Summers 1955: 786), was probably similar to the Zulu *umqubulu*, a special costume consisting of three very full fringes of furry tails, covering the body from the shoulders to the knee (see p. 361).

SANDALS

Term: *inyatelo*—sandal (Summers & Pagden 1970: 35).

Buffalo hide sandals were worn by soldiers on campaign (Summers & Pagden 1970: 25).

SKIRTS

Long black goatskin skirts, reaching to the ankles (Smith [1834–6] 1940: 307), were worn by married women, while girls wore knee-length skirts (Anderson 1888: 366, 374–375).

ORNAMENTS

Arm and leg ornaments

Soldiers wore, on the upper arm and around the calf, light fringes made by opening out the tips of cows' tails (Hughes & Summers 1955: 788).

SHIELDS

Terms: *ihawu*—shield; *isihlangu*—war shield (Hughes & Summers 1955: 785).

Shields used by Ndebele soldiers were large pointed ovals, following the Zulu prototype (Fig. 58). They were made of oxhide, from cattle slaughtered on the king's instructions, by a specialist who could cut a shield from each side of a hide, each from 77 cm to 150 cm long and 60 cm wide. War shields reached from the shoulder to the feet (Smith [1834–6] 1975: 243). They were decorated with laced strips of hide and held like the Zulu shield (Burrow [1834–6] 1971: 52; Summers & Pagden 1970, fig. 1; Bulawayo Nat. Mus. 2349, 2352, 2353, Tungwesi, 1893). The colour or shape of their shields distinguished different regiments. Experienced soldiers had lighter coloured shields than young recruits (Hughes & Summers 1955: 785). Shields served as sunshades while on the march (Moffat 1842: 504). While the large war shields were used only by royal command, small shields were carried when visiting, or by herd-boys (Wilkerson [1896] 1943: 14).

THONGS

Term: *umchilo* (Tjolutjo, 1973).

Thongs were useful for inspanning draught animals (Hughes & Van Velsen 1955: 61). Although their use and manufacture possibly increased from the latter part of the nineteenth century when the inspanning of animals was introduced by colonists, thongs had many general uses as ties and bindings.

MISCELLANEOUS

BAGS

Skin bags were used to transport grain (O'Neil 1910–11: 194).

BLANKETS

Several kinds of skin such as goat, rock-rabbit and antelope were used to make blankets. Small patches were cut and sewn together with ox-sinew thread in a fashion possibly acquired by the Ndebele earlier, while living amongst the Tswana (Tjolutjo, 1973).

SHROUDS

Chiefs and other important men were buried wrapped in the hide of a specially killed ox (Anonymous 1891: 54; Hughes & Van Velsen 1955: 101).

DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the introduction, this study covers the broad area occupied by Nguni-speakers but does not intend to imply cultural homogeneity or fixed cultural boundaries. One of the problems with studies that adopt a linguistic classificatory grid is that the boundaries are assumed and not investigated. It was not possible within the scope of the present project, initiated over a decade ago as a survey, to undertake the necessary detailed microstudy that would shed light on the diversity of local processes and boundaries. We alert the reader to this problem and hope that this general work will provide the basis for further study.

During the pre-colonial period skin-working was an essential part of material culture throughout the Nguni area. Skin-working provided dressed skins for both everyday clothing and ceremonial dress, as well as unsoftened hides that were used mainly for shields. From the early nineteenth century onwards, however, the effects of colonial contact on Nguni material culture had become so pervasive that, by the middle of the twentieth century, the craft of skin-dressing had been reduced to a vestige of its former importance. Where skin-working continued, the wider economic context—notably the migrant labour system and the increased pressure on land—resulted in changed social and economic relations.

The areas occupied by Nguni-speakers in the nineteenth century abounded in game animals, which were hunted not only for their meat but also for hides, horns and tusks. Domestic livestock provided a more regular supply of hides for household use and it is from this source that most ordinary clothing was made. The skins of certain game animals lent distinction to the dress of chiefs and headmen, leopard skin being reserved for the exclusive use of chiefs and those honoured by them.

The degree of specialization and the division of labour within the craft of skin-dressing varied slightly from group to group within the Nguni area but certain important aspects of the craft were common to the region as a whole. Men were the providers of the raw hides and skins, whether derived from the hunt or from the slaughter of domestic stock. Men were also mainly responsible for the working of skins and the manufacture of skin artefacts. In some areas women participated in the processes of softening and currying the skins, and were also responsible for the sewing and decorating of their own clothing but, in general, working with skins and hides was undertaken or supervised by men.

Throughout the Nguni area there was a tendency for warriors' apparel, shields and certain garments, such as antelope skin cloaks and married women's skirts, to be made by specialists. Skirts were often cut by a specialist and sewn by the owner. Shields and other items made of unsoftened hides were usually made by specialists.

In the Northern Nguni area there is evidence of particular specialization in the manufacture of cloaks for chiefs and of shields for the Zulu royal regiments. The rise of the Zulu kingdom created both an increased demand for prepared hides and an increased supply of labour. Some indication of the scale of production at that time is given by an instance recorded by Stuart (Webb & Wright 1976:

325), when Dingane summoned a specialist skin-worker to Mgungundlovu and instructed sixty men to bring aloe leaves to be used in currying skins for shields and 'blankets'.

In general, however, skin-working was a non-specialized domestic craft. Skins of goats and cattle were associated with the household and were usually prepared by the men of the family, often with the assistance of neighbours. Technical expertise was not exclusive to senior men, although by virtue of experience they would have been more skilled than younger men. Those craftsmen still practising in the 1970s tended to be older men but this related more to the decline in the craft and economic factors than to historical precedent.

There is some indication that cattle were slaughtered at the onset of winter, when their hair was long and would have provided the warmest cloaks, but many sources record the reluctance of Nguni men to slaughter their livestock for domestic use. Cattle or goats, however, were always slaughtered on ceremonial occasions, such as initiation, betrothal, marriage and burial, as well as when propitiating the ancestral spirits. This provided a fairly regular supply of skins and it is of interest that in many cases artefacts made from these skins were associated with the social event marked by the animal sacrifice. For example, baby-slings were made from the skin of the goat offered by the father in gratitude for the birth. Thereafter the sling was believed to be associated with the well-being of the baby. Similarly, the skins for a bride's clothing, provided according to custom by the family of the bride or groom, expressed the bond between the two families.

The association of cattle with the ancestral spirits added yet another level of meaning to the domestic use of hides. In everyday routine, the use of items made from the skins of animals offered to the ancestors affirmed the involvement of the ancestors in the lives of their descendants. The fact that access to the skins for clothing was only through men was an indication of patrilineal control over essential domestic resources.

The style of a garment, its ornamentation and quality express ethnic differences as well as differences in social status. The symbolic idiom of dress is used as a sensitive expression of identity. The cycle of development from childhood through to old age was marked by changes in dress and demeanour. As Mayer (1961: 24) noted among the Xhosa, many social distinctions, such as gradations of seniority and marital status, were formally reflected in clothing and ornament. Numerous examples can be drawn from the wider Nguni area. To cite but a few, among the Natal Nguni and the Swazi, the heavy *isidwaba* skirt was a sign of the responsibilities attached to the status of married women, and among the Southern Transvaal Ndebele differences in style and ornamentation of aprons worn by women reflected the transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood.

Although the focus here is on the skin components of dress, these should be considered within the context of costume as a whole, including other aspects of appearance such as hair-style and deportment. A married woman's appearance was marked not only by her dress but also by her coiffure, her ornaments and her

demeanour. Similarly, a cloak of distinction required the appropriate accessories to create the impression of high social status. Arm-bands of ivory and necklets made of the claws of lion or from rare glass beads are among the well-documented insignia of rank. It is likely that there were many other fine distinctions in dress that reflected status but these are less frequently described. Furthermore, changes over time in the meaning and value attached to items of dress reduce the validity of generalizations.

The question of Khoikhoi influence in the west of the Nguni area cannot be answered with any precision. The early material culture of both Xhosa and Thembu seems to have had elements in common with that of the Khoikhoi. Similarities in details of dress and in the use of certain artefacts may have reflected social or economic integration but conclusive evidence is lacking.

Material culture in general, and clothing in particular, can be used both to define and to obscure the boundaries between ethnic groupings. The Nguni area provides examples of both processes. The adoption of Sotho material culture with little modification by the Northern Transvaal Ndebele reflects their social assimilation, whereas the converse is true of the Southern Transvaal Ndebele, who have developed a distinctive style of dress and ornament as an explicit expression of their ethnic consciousness. The widespread Zulu influence in the nineteenth century in the Natal area resulted in the diminishing of earlier group differences and an apparent uniformity in material culture.

Allowing for changes in detail, it is none the less possible to suggest that there were certain cognitive regularities that gave meaning to the use of skin in Nguni material culture. The association of cattle with the ancestral spirits has been mentioned above. It can be argued that the association of powerful game animals, such as the leopard and the elephant, with the power of a chief is significant. The strength and courage required of the hunters to kill an elephant was associated with the supernatural power of the chief, who used the tusks and tail as insignia of rank. By succeeding in the hunt, the hunters proved their power over untamed forces and, metaphorically, drew strength from their prey and even assimilated the traits believed to characterize the animal. In the same way certain skins used by diviners represented the attributes of the live animal.

The decline in skin-dressing and in the use of skin products relates to a variety of factors—ecological, historical and socio-economic. It is of note that, among the Xhosa, the use of ochred clothing (originally skin, and later cotton cloth) had, by the 1960s, become symbolic of traditional conservatism, in contrast to the style of western dress first advocated by missionaries and subsequently widely adopted by educated members of the community. Differences in dress consciously adhered to by 'Red' and 'School' people reflected significant differences in lifestyle and values. Conservative migrants required to wear western dress in town would declare their traditionalism through accessories, such as leg-rings, arm-bands or a tobacco pouch. Mayer (1961: 26) suggested that in this way they made a definite statement of identity in alien surroundings.

As noted in the introduction to this study, skin-working technology is no longer a viable part of the Nguni domestic economy. In fact, for more than a hundred and fifty years cloth has been available and has provided an acceptable substitute for skin. It is of particular interest, therefore, to record the widespread revival of traditional dress on certain public occasions. Historical traditions and their material manifestations are invoked to give meaning and legitimacy to current interests (Hobsbawn & Ranger 1983). Contemporary political leaders draw on the symbolism of the past and combine the old and the new to give historical credibility to their present positions. This conjuring of the past with the present (Marks 1986: 122), using traditional skin regalia, underlines the active role that material culture plays in signifying relations of power.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AFR—Africana Museum, Johannesburg.
- BM—British Museum, London, Ethnographic collection.
- Campbell—Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban.
- DC—Duggan-Cronin Bantu Gallery, McGregor Museum, Kimberley.
- EL—East London Museum.
- MVB—Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin.
- NASKO—National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum, Pretoria.
- NM—Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg.
- SAM—South African Museum, Cape Town.
- UCT—University of Cape Town collections at the South African Museum.

6. SYSTEMATIC papers must conform to the *International code of zoological nomenclature* (particularly Articles 22 and 51).

Names of new taxa, combinations, synonyms, etc., when used for the first time, must be followed by the appropriate Latin (not English) abbreviation, e.g. gen. nov., sp. nov., comb. nov., syn. nov., etc.

An author's name when cited must follow the name of the taxon without intervening punctuation and not be abbreviated; if the year is added, a comma must separate author's name and year. The author's name (and date, if cited) must be placed in parentheses if a species or subspecies is transferred from its original genus. The name of a subsequent user of a scientific name must be separated from the scientific name by a colon.

Synonymy arrangement should be according to chronology of names, i.e. all published scientific names by which the species previously has been designated are listed in chronological order, with all references to that name following in chronological order, e.g.:

Family **Nuculanidae**

Nuculana (*Lembulus*) *bicuspidata* (Gould, 1845)

Figs 14–15A

Nucula (*Leda*) *bicuspidata* Gould, 1845: 37.

Leda plicifera A. Adams, 1856: 50.

Laeda bicuspidata Hanley, 1859: 118, pl. 228 (fig. 73). Sowerby, 1871: pl. 2 (fig. 8a–b).

Nucula largillierti Philippi, 1861: 87.

Leda bicuspidata: Nicklès, 1950: 163, fig. 301; 1955: 110. Barnard, 1964: 234, figs 8–9.

Note punctuation in the above example:

comma separates author's name and year

semicolon separates more than one reference by the same author

full stop separates references by different authors

figures of plates are enclosed in parentheses to distinguish them from text-figures

dash, not comma, separates consecutive numbers.

Synonymy arrangement according to chronology of bibliographic references, whereby the year is placed in front of each entry, and the synonym repeated in full for each entry, is not acceptable.

In describing new species, one specimen must be designated as the holotype; other specimens mentioned in the original description are to be designated paratypes; additional material not regarded as paratypes should be listed separately. The complete data (registration number, depository, description of specimen, locality, collector, date) of the holotype and paratypes must be recorded, e.g.:

Holotype

SAM–A13535 in the South African Museum, Cape Town. Adult female from mid-tide region, King's Beach, Port Elizabeth (33°51'S 25°39'E), collected by A. Smith, 15 January 1973.

Note standard form of writing South African Museum registration numbers and date.

7. SPECIAL HOUSE RULES

Capital initial letters

- (a) The Figures, Maps and Tables of the paper when referred to in the text
e.g. '... the Figure depicting *C. namacolus* ...'; '... in *C. namacolus* (Fig. 10) ...'
- (b) The prefixes of prefixed surnames in all languages, when used in the text, if not preceded by initials or full names
e.g. Du Toit but A. L. du Toit; Von Huene but F. von Huene
- (c) Scientific names, but not their vernacular derivatives
e.g. Therocephalia, but therocephalian

Punctuation should be loose, omitting all not strictly necessary

Reference to the author should preferably be expressed in the third person

Roman numerals should be converted to arabic, except when forming part of the title of a book or article, such as

'Revision of the Crustacea. Part VIII. The Amphipoda.'

Specific name must not stand alone, but be preceded by the generic name or its abbreviation to initial capital letter, provided the same generic name is used consecutively. The generic name should not be abbreviated at the beginning of a sentence or paragraph.

Name of new genus or species is not to be included in the title; it should be included in the abstract, counter to Recommendation 23 of the Code, to meet the requirements of Biological Abstracts.



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SOME NGUNI CRAFTS
PART 4
SKIN-WORKING TECHNOLOGY